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**MUSLIM POLITICS IN BENGAL**  
**1937-1947**





# **MUSLIM POLITICS IN BENGAL 1937-1947**

**SHILA SEN**



**Impex India  
New Delhi**

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## Preface

A systematic analysis of Muslim politics in Bengal during the ten years preceding partition is important because it has since been pivotal in shaping politics of the entire sub-continent. Like Muslims in other parts of India, by 1945-46 Muslims in Bengal showed a rare unanimity on the Pakistan demand. However, the underlying long-term political forces in Bengal Muslim politics were inherently different from those of Muslim politics elsewhere in India.

The study was undertaken as a Ph.D. dissertation at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

In this book I have tried to analyse the forces in Muslim politics in Bengal—inside and outside the Muslim League—during the period (1937-1947), especially the forces which led to the consolidation and popularity of the Muslim League and emergence of Pakistan. The nature of the Pakistan movement in Bengal and the reasons for its success have also been discussed. I have tried to evaluate Bengali Muslim aspirations behind the Pakistan movement and also how broad based it was in Bengal. An effort has also been made to analyse the reasons for the emergence of a demand for an independent sovereign Bengal by a section of the Bengal Muslim leadership on the eve of partition.

The work is primarily based on records and files of the Government of India (1937-45) available at the National Archives of India, New Delhi; records and files of the Government of Bengal (1937-47) available at the State Archives, Calcutta, and the Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca; debates of the Bengal Legislative Assembly and Council; and contemporary newspapers and party journals in Bengali and English. Files of *Azad*, an important mouthpiece of the Bengal Muslim League, which were available only at Dacca, were also looked into. Personal interviews with leading personalities, both at Dacca and Calcutta, who played a momentous role in the politics of those days, like the late Abul Hashim, Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (1943-47), have been useful in

analysing the events.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, Professor Bimal Prasad, Chairman, Centre for South, South-East and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, for his encouragement, guidance and help. I am also thankful to Professor Mafizulla Kabir of Dacca University for his suggestions. I thank the staff of the National Archives of India, New Delhi, the State Archives, West Bengal, Calcutta, and the Bangladesh Archives, Dacca, for their assistance. I also thank the staff of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, the Indian Council of World Affairs Library, New Delhi, the National Library, the Sahitya Parishad, the Muslim Institute, Calcutta, the Dacca University Library, the Bangla Development Board, Dacca, and the Chittagong University Library.

My sincerest gratitude is due to my husband Amaresh Sen but for whose perseverance, patience and willing co-operation I could never have completed this work. I am also indebted to my father-in-law the late Rai Bahadur R.C. Sen, mother-in-law, Giribala Devi, my father Dr. P.C. Ghosh and mother Amiya Ghosh for their continuous encouragement in my work. I am grateful to Mirza Golam Hafiz for his hospitality and help during my stay in Dacca. I should like to thank Kalipada Biswas, M.V. Sastri, Arun Joshi and Mrs. Andrade for their help. I also thank Yogesh Sharma for his regular and careful typing of the manuscript.

New Delhi  
March, 1976

SHILA SEN

## CHAPTER I

# THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

This study of Muslim politics in Bengal during the ten years preceding partition brings out the interplay of three factors. Firstly, the majority community (Muslims) in Bengal was economically, socially and politically backward in relation to the minority community. This generated a feeling among Muslims that they were economically exploited, culturally subjugated and politically dominated by Hindus. Hence a search for a separate identity began among the former. Secondly, Muslims' majority position was not strong enough to enable them to pursue an independent line in politics because the two communities were almost evenly matched in numbers. The slight advantage the Muslim population enjoyed over Hindus was more than counter-balanced by the superior position of the latter in the economic, social and political life of the province. The emerging Muslim middle-class found all roads to its advancement blocked by Hindus and it had to search for new outlets. Therefore, Muslims in Bengal could not depend on their majority (as was the case with Muslims of the North-West Frontier Province till 1945) and were subjected to pulls of all India political forces. Thirdly, by the thirties of the present century Bengali Muslims had reached an advanced stage of political awakening and produced an articulate section which ventilated their grievances and asserted their rights.<sup>1</sup> This section wanted to play an effective role in the life of the province, but could not fit into Congress politics.

Two facts, i.e., the fact of 'Muslim majority' and that of

1. The expressions 'Muslims in Bengal' and 'Bengali Muslims' have been used as identical terms.



'Muslim backwardness', in Bengal perhaps were the antithesis of the political development as well as political cohesion which Bengal achieved during the nineteenth century, if one sees it through the Hindu point of view. The basis of this cohesion was of course Western education introduced by the British. From the Muslims' point of view, on the other hand, to understand their alienation from the dominant pattern of social and political life of Bengal during this period one has to keep in mind the character of the changes brought about by the British rule in Bengal. A number of research studies have been produced on the economic, social and political history of Bengal during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries analysing with varying emphasis the two currents in Bengal's life, one, the educationally advanced Hindu community taking advantage of economic opportunities because of their positive attitude to the changes brought about by the new rule and, the other, the backward Muslim community brooding over the past and the ruin brought about by the British who replaced them as the ruling power in Bengal.<sup>2</sup>

2. The important published works on the subject are : M.A. Haque, *History and Problem of Muslim Education in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1917); S. Gopal, *The Permanent Settlement in Bengal and its Results* (London, 1949); N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to Permanent Settlement*, Vol. II (1962); Azizur Rahman Mallick, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal 1757-1856* (Dacca, 1961); Pradip Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal : Aspects of Social History* (Calcutta, 1965); Muin-ud-Din Ahmed Khan, *History of Fara'idi Movement in Bengal 1818-1906* (Karachi, 1966) and *Selections from Bengal Government Records on Wahabi Trials 1863-1870* (Dacca, 1961); Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism Competition and Collaboration in the later 19th Century* (Cambridge, 1968); A.K.N. Karim, *The Modern Muslim Political Elite in Bengal* (Dacca, 1972); A.H.M. Nooruzzaman, *Rise of the Muslim Middle Classes as a Political Factor in India and Pakistan 1858-1947* (Dacca, 1970); Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884-1912*, (Dacca, 1974). The important unpublished work on the subject is : L. Khatun, "Some Aspects of the Social History of Bengal with Special Reference to the Muslims 1854-1884" (M.A. Paper, London, 1956). For contemporary works on the social conditions of the Muslims in Bengal during early 19th century please see Transactions of the Bengal Social Science Association, *Proceedings*, Vol. I-III, 1867-1869 (Calcutta); H.H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1892).

Bengal at the turn of the century had a large concentration of Muslims, the largest in India. This preponderance dates back to a few centuries. The origin of Bengali Muslims became a subject matter of controversy after 1871 when the first census was taken. Muslims in Bengal proper in 1871 constituted 48.8 per cent of the population.<sup>3</sup> According to the 1891 census, Muslims and Hindus in Bengal proper were 19,582,349 and 18,068,655 out of a total population of 40,367,807.<sup>4</sup> A steady rise in the number of Muslims in the eastern divisions of Bengal became particularly notable. The urban population of Muslims in 1891 was 3.5 per cent. In 1881, the number and percentage (vis-a-vis the total population) of Muslims in the eastern divisions of Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong were 4,885,156 (63.16 per cent), 5,531,869 (63.57 per cent) and 2,425,610 (67.86 per cent), respectively.<sup>5</sup> In 1891 their population rose to 5,025,330 in Rajshahi, 6,429,017 in Dacca and 2,909,782 in Chittagong.<sup>6</sup> A comparative study of the first three decades shows that the rise was confined mainly to the eastern districts, more particularly to Mymensingh, Pabna, Noakhali and Tripura.<sup>7</sup>

While discussing the causes of the preponderance of Muslims in Bengal the British officials and anthropologists were of one opinion, i.e. this was due to the local conversion of lower caste Hindus to Islam by Muslim saints as a result of the rigidity of the Hindus' caste system. Thus, the majority of Muslims in Bengal were from the lower strata of Hindu society, and not from the aristocratic elements from Arabia, Persia and Afghanistan who had settled in Bengal.<sup>8</sup>

This view of the Hindu origin of the majority of Muslims in Bengal was challenged by Khondkar Fuzli Rubbee in his

3. *Report on the Census of Bengal 1872*, pp. xxxii-iii.

4. *Report on the Census of Bengal 1891*, vol. III, p. 147.

5. *1881 Census Bengal*, vol. 1, Appendix A.A. no. 1.

6. *1891 Census Bengal*, vol. III, p. 147.

7. Please see Appendix I. The districtwise figures of the numbers of Muslims from 1901 to 1931 are collected from census reports.

8. H. Beverly, *Report on the Census of Bengal 1872*, p. 190; E.A. Gait, *Census of India 1901*, vol. VI: Report on the Lower Provinces of Bengal and their Feudatories, part 1, pp. 165-70; Risley, n. 2, vol. I.

book "The Origin of the Mussalman of Bengal" (1895).<sup>9</sup> He points out that from 1204 A.D. to 1765 A.D. (a period of 562 years) 76 Muslim governors or Nazims ruled Bengal. With a few exceptions, they were of either Afghan, Mughal, Iranian or Arab origin. A large number of Muslims of all classes from these places came and settled in Bengal. Some came with the conquerors, others on account of disturbances in their own land and some in search of livelihood.<sup>10</sup> The tendency to trace their origin to families in distant lands always remained the characteristic of the Bengali Muslim aristocracy and the dominant factor in shaping Muslim attitude from late 19th century to the early decades of this century. A number of recent studies have described this attitude as the main cause of the backwardness of the Muslim community in terms of modern English education and social and economic progress.<sup>11</sup>

The preponderance of Muslims in Eastern Bengal due to local conversions is generally the most accepted view.<sup>12</sup> The other view is that Hinduism did not permeate beyond the western part of Bengal proper, which had a self-sufficient economy.<sup>13</sup> These two opinions have not been challenged yet. The fact that the natives of Bengal were attracted by democratic liberalism in Islam, which assured them social equality denied to them in a caste-ridden Hindu society, has been

9. The second edition of the book has been published by Society for Pakistan Studies, Dacca, in 1970. Also see Kazi Abdul Wadud, "The Mussalmans of Bengal" in A.C. Gupta, ed., *Studies in Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta, 1958), pp. 460-2. Kazi Wadud was the first to make an analysis of Rubbee's book and his views.

10. Rubbee, n. 9, pp. 17-18.

11. Khatun, n. 2, p. 10; A.K. Nazmul Karim, *Muslim Social Classes in East Pakistan, Changing Society in India and Pakistan* (Karachi, 1956), pp. 120-30; Badruddin Umar, *Sanskritir Sankat* (Dacca, 1972), pp. 35-39; A. Dey, *Bangali Buddhijibi O Bichchinatabad* (Calcutta, 1974), pp. 168-9.

12. Wadud, n. 9, p. 461; S. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults* (Calcutta, 1962), edn. 2, pp. 58-60; Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims* (Bombay, 1959), p. 1.

13. N.K. Bose, *Modern Bengal* (Calcutta 1958), pp. 1-8. The census reports of 1901, 1911 and 1931 have elaborately dealt with the causes of the Muslim majority in Bengal and support more or less the arguments given in the census reports of 1872 and 1891.

sought to be established by the analysis in the census reports of 1901, 1911 and 1931.<sup>14</sup>

However, the fact that the rise in the number of Muslims in the eastern part continued on the same scale during the first three decades of the century when there were no conversions as well as no influx of foreign settlers, proves that the higher rate of birth among Muslims than among Hindus also contributed to their majority position in Eastern Bengal.<sup>15</sup> The rise in the number of Muslims during the decade 1881 to 1891 and decades 1901 to 1931 proves this point. Whatever that may have been, the important point is that both leading Muslims in Bengal and British civilians were conscious of the preponderance of this community in Bengal proper since the last century.

## II

Another important point deserving attention is that the 19th century developments in the Hindu and Muslim societies in Bengal were poles apart. Whatever might be the causes of the different reactions of Muslims and Hindus to the changes brought about by the British system of administration, their varied response was the main cause of the difference of outlook between them in the nineteenth century.

Till 1837 when Persian continued to be the language of both upper and lower courts, the learned sections of Muslims were unconcerned with utility of English education. From 1781 when the first Government college, i.e. Calcutta Madrasa, was established<sup>16</sup> by Hastings who left the traditional modes of instruction undisturbed, to 1844 when Hardinge instructed all departments in the government to give preference to persons knowing English language, the Muslim aristocracy in Bengal continued their old studies considered essential for their

14. *Census of India 1901*, Vol. VI (Bengal), part I, pp. 165-6; *Census of India 1911*, Vol. V, Bengal (Calcutta, 1913), part II, Appendix to Table XII—part B, pp. 191-202; *Census of India 1931*, Vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, part I.

15. Abdul Moudud, *Moudhyabittya Samajer Bikash : Sanskritir Rupantar* (Dacca, 1969), pp. 13-14

16. *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. VIII, January-June 1914, p. 89.

religion. It is generally supposed that they did not take to English education also because of the fear that it would lead to Christian proselytization on a large scale.<sup>17</sup> This was, however, not the main factor behind Muslim backwardness in modern education. What the Lt.-Governor Reeves Thompson concluded in 1885 offers a more reasonable explanation for this. He emphasised that the low educational percentage of Muslims was confined to districts where they occupied a low place in the social scale and the situation was the reverse of it in those parts of the country where they were comparatively well off. This, he said, seemed "to support the conclusion that the traditional explanation is incorrect, and that it is the comparative poverty of Muhammadans rather than any special prejudices of theirs which accounts for their apparent neglect of the facilities for higher education which the existing system offers".<sup>18</sup>

Whatever the cause, the fact is undisputed that while Hindus made rapid progress in English education, Muslims in Bengal maintained their isolation so far as English education was concerned even after the introduction of English classes in Calcutta Madrasa in 1829.<sup>19</sup> This explains the small number of English schools, whether primary or middle or secondary, established by the Muslim upper classes in Bengal during the greater part of nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, a large number of such schools were established by Hindus before the education

17. Phillip Hartog, *Some Aspects of Indian Education Past and Present* (n.d.), p. 13. See Ahmed, n. 2, p. 8. (Sir Phillip was the first Vice-Chancellor of Dacca University, 1920-25).

18. *General Report on Public Instructions, Bengal 1884-85*, p. 18. Also see Khatun, n. 2, p. 134.

19. In 1829 optional English classes were added to the Arabic Department. Between 1829 and 1851 altogether 1,787 students were taught in Calcutta Madrasa but it produced only two English junior scholars, Abdul Latif and Wahiuddin Nabi. Mohsin College, Hoogly in the same period also produced two English junior scholars, Musa Ali and Waris Ali. *Bengal Past and Present*, vol. VIII, January-March 1914, p. 96.

20. Khatun, n. 2, pp. 44-45. The grants-in-aid for elementary and Junior education were given on the basis of strict religious neutrality and no school was aided unless the local contribution, including fees, amounted to Rs. 10/- a month. Grants-in-aid whose main purpose was to encourage self-help failed to operate on the Muslims because of (1) poverty, and (2) lack of sympathy on the part of the well-to-do classes. The Muslims took

despatch of 1854 recommended the establishment of a university at Calcutta.<sup>21</sup> With a very few exceptions, like the Mohsin Endowment (1806) and Hoogly Mohsin College (1836) which was established with financial grant from the Mohsin Trust, Muslim orientation to the traditional studies continued. (Even Hoogly College was attached to Hoogly Madrassa). The Government's encouragement to the opening of new Madrassas at Dacca, Rajshahi and Chittagong fitted in with this trend. The Government decided that "Mahomedan Madrassas should be grafted on to the existing colleges and high schools at the centres of Mahomedan population in Bengal".<sup>22</sup>

A look at the number of Muslim students studying at English schools during the sixties of nineteenth century and the number of successful Muslim examinees at Calcutta University at the turn of the century would confirm the point made above. The number of Muslim students taking education in colleges and schools in Bengal during 1865-66 was as follows:<sup>23</sup>

Colleges	No. of Institutions	Total No. of Pupils	Muslims	Hindus	Others
Government Inst.	7	753	14	727	12
Private Inst.	5	339	13	294	32
	12	1092	27	1021	44
<i>Schools Higher Class</i>					
Government	50	9176	1222	7856	98
Private	90	9623	339	8972	312
	140	18799	1561	16828	410
<i>Middle Class</i>					
Government	117	8124	1029	6941	154
Private	941	37926	3212	33955	759
	1058	46050	4241	40896	913
<i>Lower Class</i>					
Government	81 )	37414	5040	32374	—
Private	1205 )				

the least advantage of grants-in-aid because they generally sent their children to Maktabas imparting mainly religious instructions.

21. *Education Proceedings*, 9 December 1858.

22. Resolution of Government of Bengal, 29 July 1873, para 3, *Calcutta Gazette*, 30 July 1873, Supplement.

23. Selections from the Records of Government of India, Home Department : *The Note on the State of Education in India during 1865-66*.

The Director of Public Instruction (DPI) of Bengal thus commented : "... it is unquestionable that the Hindus as a race took more readily to our system of education. Of the whole number of Hindus and Muhammadans attending colleges only 3½ per cent are Muhammadans".<sup>24</sup>

While the slow progress in Muslim education can be construed as reflecting the social attitude of the Muslim upper classes towards their own community and an evidence of the lack of understanding of the social developments by the Muslim elite in Bengal may be debatable, as late as 1869 Amir Ali maintained that the Madrassa should not be visited by "the children of those classes who have taken to husbandry or the low professions".<sup>25</sup> The reason he gave was that educating them in the learned sciences was against the order of things in the world, for everyone had been created for a special subject.

The attitude of the educated few in the Muslim society towards the spread of education among its larger sections worked against "the downward infiltration theory of educating few in the hope that it would result in the education of the masses".<sup>26</sup> The attitude of the well-to-do classes as well as the English educated towards spread of education, traditional, English or vernacular, complicated social progress of Muslims and brought confusion, contradiction and lack of cohesion among them. Whereas the traditional teaching in languages other than vernacular created a gulf between the learned and the uneducated masses, English education created a crisis of identity in those few English educated who wanted to bring synthesis between the traditional modes of teaching and the English system of education but in the process lost the race with Hindus who had long back taken

24. Ibid.

25. Report of the Committee formed to enquire into the condition of Madrassa in 1869. Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Home Department, no. CCV, part II, p. 43. Calcutta Madrassa admitted students till the year 1872 only on the production of 'sharafatnama' i.e. certificate of respectability and 'sharafatnama' was insisted upon by all the noted men in Bengal like Abdul Latif, Moulvi Abdul Jubber, Mir Mahommed Ismail. In that year, 'sharafatnama' was discontinued by the Government and instead a certificate of conduct was introduced. This lamentably demonstrated the social attitudes of the cream of the Muslim society in Calcutta.

26. Khatun, n. 2, p. 32.

to English and vernacular education. The nostalgia of both sections towards vernacular, i.e. Bengali language, deepened the gulf between the uneducated masses and the educated few and resulted in a situation where as late as the eighties of the last century the leaders and learned men among Bengali Muslims were those who did not know Bengali. This anomaly in the Bengali Muslim society further retarded social progress of Muslims.

Their attitude towards vernacular education, i.e. primary education, was equally confused. In 1837 Persian was replaced by English and vernacular as court languages and Wood's despatch of 1854 laid great stress on vernacular education. However, Muslims were slack in taking advantage of the Government's facilities for imparting primary education to the masses by opening vernacular schools with grants-in-aid or by opening vernacular classes and introducing secular subjects in the existing Makhtabs in order to fetch Government grants and aid. The Government's grants-in-aid for elementary education till the seventies were given on the basis of strict religious neutrality, for imparting secular education only.<sup>27</sup>

### III

Beginning with the 1870s, the British became increasingly concerned with the state of education among Bengali Muslims. With a view to understading the working of the Muslim mind after the suppression of the Wahabi uprisings, in 1871 Mayo asked a Bengal civilian, W. W. Hunter, to write a book on the burning question of the day : "Are Indian Mussalmans bound by their religion to rebel against the Queen?"<sup>28</sup> While analysing the conditions of Muslims under British rule, particularly in Bengal, Hunter made a strong plea for a policy of conciliation towards them and in a note on 26 June 1871 to Mayo suggested how best "to persuade Muslims to enter Government schools and colleges more willingly...."<sup>29</sup> This

27. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

28. F.H. Skrini, *Life of Sir William Hunter* (London, 1901), p. 199, quoted in P. Hardy, *Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 85.

29. Hardy, n. 28, p. 85.



resulted in the Government of India Resolution of 7 August 1871 wherein Mayo expressed surprise that "so large and important a class, possessing a classical literature replete with works of profound learning and great values . . . should stand aloof from active cooperation with our educational system and should lose the advantages both material and social which others enjoy."<sup>30</sup>

Thus set in a new line of approach to the question of Muslim education, particularly in Bengal, it being the most active centre of Mujahidin. Hunter's book also profusely influenced official policy.<sup>31</sup> The Government's awakening to these needs of the Muslims in Bengal so that they could share 'the advantages both social and material' with others, the direct sequence of the shift in policy towards Muslims, found expression in many a Government resolution directed towards systematic encouragement of education among Muslims. The Resolution of the Government of India of 7 August 1871 which promised encouragement for primary education<sup>32</sup>; the findings of the Education Commission 1882 which was asked to give careful consideration to the question of Muslim education and which suggested 9 ways and 17 recommendations<sup>33</sup>,

30. *India Education Proceedings*, August 1871, para 1.

31. "Hunter was almost certainly acting as a receiving set for transmission of an official policy in gestation while he was writing, for on page 204 of his book he writes 'the Government has awakened to the necessity of really educating the Mussalmans' and Mayo had already, as will be seen, adduced somewhat similar arguments in his note of 26 June 1871, that is three days before Hunter completed his manuscript." Hardy, n. 28, p. 88.

32. Mayo made an additional grant of Rs. 50,000 to Bengal. Khatun, n. 2, p. 69.

33. Ripon appointed the Education Commission on 3 February 1882 with Hunter as President, and 24 other members (official and non-official). The Commission accepted Government of Bengal's recommendation that any religious school was entitled to get aid if it taught secular subjects. On Muslim education the Commission's recommendations were that a graduated system of scholarship should be instituted beginning with primary school; free-studentships should be offered in primary schools. Maktabas were to be encouraged to teach secular subjects, any association or organization engaged in the promotion of Muslim education were to be recognized and the General Report on Public Instruction must include a section on Muslim education.

climaxed by the Government of India Resolution of 23 October 1884 which urged the whole problem of Muslim education being given "separate consideration", give a fair idea of the working of the Government of India's mind.<sup>34</sup>

There was a striking difference between the attitude of the Government of India and that of the Government of Bengal towards the question of Muslim education. Whereas the Bengal Governor again and again reported that the Madrassa system did not meet the wants of Muslims<sup>35</sup> and that they should be given education in general schools where as a concession to Muslims "there will be special class to teach Mohammedans Arabic or Persian after their fashion"<sup>36</sup>, the Government of India insisted on the encouragement and promotion of Madrassa education.<sup>37</sup>

Much of the educational progress among Muslims in Bengal was due to the initiative of Lt. Governor George Campbell. He introduced the stipendary system in 1871. In his famous resolution of 29 July 1873 he introduced innovation and

34. D.M. Barbour dissented on the Commission's decision regarding special treatment of the Muslims. Ahmed, n. 2, pp. 22-23.

35. Lt. Governor A.R. Thomson after inspecting Madrassas at Dacca and Rajshahi wrote to the Governor General in Council that these institutions were "unsuited to the wants of the Mohammedan community" and recommended their abolition and the utilization of these funds thus saved for the starting a Mohammedan College in Calcutta. However, the Government only added First Arts classes to the Anglo-Persian section of Calcutta Madrassa in 1884, on the recommendation of the Education Commission (1882). *General Report on Public Instruction, 1883-84*.

36. Lt. Governor George Campbell's Minute dated 4 December 1871; he recommended general education for Muslims in Bengal, *General Report on Public Instruction Bengal, 1871-72*.

37. As early as 1858 Lt. Governor Halliday recommended that Calcutta Madrassa (Arabic-Department) should be abolished, Arabic Professorship be attached to the University and the Anglo-Persian Department to be retained (Official Minute dated 15 September 1858). However, the Government of India rejected the idea of abolishing the Madrassa, but suggested its improvement (*Bengal Education Proceedings*, July 1860, No. 11). The Madrassas in Dacca, Chittagong and Rajshahi continued to be built as late as 1874. However, Rajshahi Madrassa was abolished in 1883 due to poor attendance. Hoogly Madrassa, although a failure, was allowed to continue in deference to the will of Muslims. Khatun, n. 2, p. 117.

carefully used the funds at his disposal for the promotion of higher education among Muslims. It was he who abolished the 'Sharafatnama' and introduced certificate of good conduct and thereby liberalised admission into Calcutta Madrassa. In the meanwhile, the Government of India continued to express its concern for the spread of English education among Muslims and suggested (1) the encouragement of classical and vernacular languages of Muslims in all Government schools and colleges and (2) establishment of English schools in Muslim districts.<sup>38</sup> These, however, remained merely as ornamental resolutions in the Government's files.

Tol and Chatuspatty, Maktab and Madrassa were the traditional modes of learning of Hindus and Muslims but with the spread of English education Hindus flocked round pathshalas which were general schools for primary education in vernacular and thereafter for English middle schools. Muslims not only continued to cling to Maktab and Madrassas but their leaders tried to fit this system in with the Government's policy of educational grants-in-aid. Besides, their aversion for vernacular language led them to despise pathshalas. The result was that the pathshalas and middle English schools not only became Hindu majority institutions but also became mostly Hindu owned and Hindu controlled. In 1891 Government's encouragement to primary education among Muslims consisted of recognising Maktab teaching Urdu and Persian for grants-in-aid if there was provision for teaching Bengali and Arithmetic.<sup>39</sup> As late as 1904 the expert committee discussed the question of aid to Maktab and decided that some Maktab should be set up under direct supervision of the Education Department to serve as model Maktab which would turn out also *Mianjis* (teachers in Maktab). The scheme, put into operation in 1906, appointed Inspecting Moulvis to supervise Maktab in order

38. Resolution of the Government of India, 7 August 1871, *India Education Proceedings*, August 1871. See also *Report of Indian Education Commission 1883*, p. 517 onwards. The Provincial Committee selected witnesses to be examined. In Bengal, Nawab Abdul Latif, Syed Amir Ali and Syed Amir Hossain gave evidence before the Commission.

39. Circular of Sir A.W. Croft, Director of Public Instruction, Bengal (1878 to 1897), Ahmed, n. 2, p. 29-30.

to popularize Muslim primary education<sup>40</sup> and not general primary education, and decided upon a special curriculum for Maktabs in Calcutta. The Government gave special importance to Urdu teaching and appointed an additional Urdu teacher even when Muslim percentage in a high school was only 10.

This orientation towards the traditional modes of learning at the primary level, a definitely retrograde step, fostered by Government and agreed to by the leaders was perhaps the greatest snag in the modernisation of the Muslim community. Not that the state of higher education was any better or that the attitude of the leaders more promising. In 1907 when DPI Archdale Earle in a conference attended by representatives of Eastern Bengal and Assam also suggested means for "modernising" the Madrassas by making English compulsory in these institutions, the Muslim representatives did not like the idea and ultimately the Government did not approve it. In 1910 in Eastern Bengal and Assam a new scheme was introduced in secondary education called Middle Madrasa where in the English section, Urdu and Persian were permitted upto certain classes and in the Arabic section, arrangements were made for the teaching of English, Geography and Modern History.<sup>41</sup>

It was this clinging to Madrasa studies through modification and enlargement but not its abandonment by switching altogether to general English and vernacular education, which dominated the outlook of educated Muslims, though with variations. This was the primary cause of the educational backwardness of Muslims which existed in Bengal during the first few decades of twentieth century.

Madrasa education did not suit the changing times. The *Muslim Chronicle* of January 21, 1899 portrayed the exact position into which a Madrasa educated found himself in the following words :

An Arabic student from a Bengal Madrasa is a peculiar scholar. While he can explain Arabic philosophy and

40. Ahmed, n. 2, pp. 37-40.

41. *Quinquennial Review of Education in Eastern Bengal and Assam 1901-02 to 1906-07*, vol. I, p. 101.

has at his command a budget of apt quotations from Persian poetry, he has a very insufficient knowledge of the districts where he will have to earn his livelihood and is therefore unfit to conduct business. He can neither be a clerk nor a sarkar, a journalist nor author....

It further commented that such a person could get a job neither under government nor in private offices or in 'sheristas' of merchants or local zamindars. His chances were only in the Education Department where there was no prospect because of the small number of vacancies.

However, with the turn of the century, Muslims began showing awareness of the need for general education. In 1902 a writer in *Islam-Pracharak* accusing their forefathers for the failure to envisage a plan which would allow the next generations to "acquire the official language English without losing their religion", maintained that their descendants were suffering for "this error of theirs".<sup>42</sup> It was asserted that the educational backwardness among Muslims had arisen because of their failure to act in accordance with the prevailing tendencies of the time and their indifference to mass education introduced by the British.<sup>43</sup> In 1906 in an illuminating article in *Islam-Pracharak*, Abdul Huq Choudhury reminded Muslims that according to the teaching of the Prophet one should go even to China if knowledge was available there and asked why they felt shy and indifferent to English education.<sup>44</sup> A number of writers in *Saogat* vehemently criticised the Madrassa system saying that this was the root cause of Muslims falling

42. Ebric Maaz, "Musalman boarding ba chhatrabash", *Islam Pracharak*, Falgun-Chaitra, 1308 B.S. (1902), English translation quoted in Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in Bengali Press 1901-30* (Dacca. 1973), p. 171.

43. Aftabuddin Ahmed, "Bangiya Mussalmaner Siksa", *Islam-Pracharak*, sixth year, no. 3, Asarh 1311 B.S. and No. 8, Agrahayan 1311 B.S. (1904), *ibid.*, p. 172.

44. Abdul Huq Choudhury, "Musalman Sampradaya O tahar patan", *Islam Pracharak*, eighth year, no. 11, 1906.

behind their Hindu neighbours.<sup>45</sup> Muslims were realising slowly the price they were paying in terms of facilities in material life for their clinging to Persian, Arabic and all other elements of traditional education. But by this time there had emerged a gap of almost one century between Hindus who switched to English education in early nineteenth century and Muslims who started seriously thinking in this century. The syllabii, the books, the curriculum in modern educational institutions were all selected and arranged keeping in mind mostly the requirements of Hindu students, not only because of the fact that Hindus constituted a majority among the students and teachers but also because of the fact that the writers of books, especially in vernacular, were mostly Hindus.

This in time became another snag in the promotion of vernacular education among Muslims besides their despising the Bengali language. The Muslim press was quite vocal in condemning Hinduised books in pathsalas and schools.<sup>46</sup> The editor of *Nur-al-Iman*, for instance, condemned in strong language the books in the pathsala-syllabus which did not teach a Muslim boy anything about his religion, etiquette and customs, contained stories from Hindu mythology and maligned Muslims as *Mlechhas* and *Yavanas*.<sup>47</sup> The Eastern Bengal and Assam Education Proceedings, 1906 contained a note by a eminent Bengali Muslim saying that the subjects taught are "emanations from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Raghubangsha...." Muslims, he asserted, "could ill-afford to see their children being thus deluged with such idolatrous ideas and for a time shrank from sending their children to the vernacular school, which to them was in fact a pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses, but they could not help it in the long run; this state of things impeded the progress of Muhammedan education in Bengal."<sup>48</sup> While

45. Ahsanullah, "Mollader Prabhab O Siksita Samaji"; editorial "Siksha Khetre Musalman"; Khan Bahadur Nasiruddin Ahmad, "Islam O Musalman" in *Saogat*, sixth year, no. 3 (1928), no. 12 (1929), seventh year, no. 8 (1930) respectively.

46. For a detailed discussion on the subject please see Nurul Islam n. 42 Chapter on Education, pp. 169-97.

47. Editor, 'Hemayet Islam' *Nur-al-Iman*, 1st year, no. 2, Sraban 1307 B.S. (1900), quoted in Nurul Islam, n. 42 p. 180.

48. *The Eastern Bengal and Assam Education Proceedings*, April 1906.

upholding Muslims objections to the text books, a Government report stated that these books with "a distinctively Hindu complexion" containing elevation of Hindu worship and stories from Hindu mythology were disliked by Muslim parents.<sup>49</sup>

The feeling that Hindu dominance in modern education was one of the causes of Muslim apathy towards it continued throughout this period. In course of time this developed into a determined effort on the part of the Muslim intelligentsia to remove this dominance and assert their own claims to an equitable share. In 1929, the editor of *Saogat* pointed out that no Muslim had yet been selected as Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University and the post had become a monopoly of the other community. Drawing the attention of the Government to this, the editor mentioned the names of a number of Muslims like Sir Abdur Rahim, Sir Ghuznavi, A.K. Fazlul Huq, and A.F. Rahman, any one of whom could be appointed to such a position. In 1937, *Masik Mohammadi* brought out an entire issue on Calcutta University with a number of articles dealing with its various branches and stages of learning and pointed out that to a large extent the syllabii and curricula had a Hindu bias.<sup>50</sup>

Thus Bengal Muslims' awareness of their educational backwardness gave a thorough shake-up to their mind and led to the development of what has been described in later pages as Bengali Muslims' search for identity, social, cultural and political.

#### IV

The root cause of the economic backwardness of the Bengali Muslims lay in the fact that they were essentially an agriculturist community, and, therefore, poorer than Muslims in other regions of India. Though Bengal was ruled by a Muslim Dewan/Subedar under the regime at Delhi or otherwise, the ruling elite during those times formed a negligible minority in comparison to the vast mass of peasants and cultivators, majority of whom were converts from poor Hindus.

49. *The Quinquennial Review of Education in India 1907 to 1912* vol. I, p. 250.

50. *Masik Mohammadi*, ninth year, no. 8, Jyaistha 1344 B.S. (1937).

The much publicised theory that the changes introduced by the British, particularly in the agrarian system, brought the economic ruin of the Muslim upper class, is not tenable. More than half a century before the establishment of the British system, the revenue collectors or the zamindars under Murshid Quli Khan, who ruled Bengal as Dewan and Subedar, were Hindus. Nine-tenths of the zamindaris in Bengal were under Hindus while the kanungo department was manned exclusively by them.<sup>51</sup> On the basis of some unpublished research works done on the subject, Hardy has shown that only two of the fifteen biggest zamindaris were under Muslims and in the Muslim majority region of Eastern Bengal one-tenth of the managers of zamindaris were Muslims.<sup>52</sup>

In Bengal, the Muslim ruling elite consisted of military aristocracy and, therefore, the much criticised Permanent Settlement or the procedure of Resumption Certificate did not ruin them as is generally held. Within twenty years of the Permanent Settlement at least one-third of the landed property was sold to pay for arrears of revenue but there was no proof that Muslims were singled out. Muslims in other parts of India were better off even after the introduction of the British landed proprietorship because they were not 'polarised' into a few military aristocrats "at the one extreme and the illiterate cultivators at the other" as in Bengal.<sup>53</sup>

There is no doubt, however, that the Muslim military aristocracy in Bengal was badly affected economically by the administrative changes introduced by the British. With the East India Company having military power in its hands, the native army which "was, more or less, a monopoly of the Muslims"<sup>54</sup>, was completely disbanded. The Muslim chiefs were not also absorbed in the army of the company while very few of the lower ranks

51. Sinha, n. 2, p. 229.

52. Hardy, n. 28, p. 44. He has cited the following doctoral theses : A.H.M. Nooruzzaman, "Rise of the Muslim Middle Classes as a Political Factor in India and Pakistan 1858-1947" (London, 1964), p. 42 and A.K.M. Karim, "The Modern Muslim Political Elite in Bengal" (London, 1964), p. 272.

53. Hardy, n. 28, p. 44.

54. Azizur Rahman Mullick, n. 2, p. 31.



were taken. These chiefs settled in rural areas, but had little landed property.

Those who had grants of land could, of course, settle as landlords, but the fact that the Company commanded the treasuries meant that the Muslim aristocracy no longer possessed the liquid resources which could have been used for purchasing land. Hardy rightly concludes that "the Permanent Settlement meant, in the circumstances of eighteenth century Bengal, the virtual closing of door to landlordism to Muslims".<sup>55</sup>

British economic interests in the shape of plantations and mill industry posed a challenge to the rural economy of Bengal. The Permanent Settlement affected more the lot of the cultivating classes in Bengal than the zamindari system.<sup>56</sup> By investing proprietorship of land in the zamindar for perpetuity the Act of Settlement placed the cultivators at the former's mercy. The peasants were virtually reduced to a state of semi-slaves.<sup>57</sup> The majority of the cultivators being Muslims, it was they whose economic ruin was brought about by the Permanent Settlement. The arbitrary rates of rent, the illegal exactions, the highhandedness and violent acts of the zamindars and their agents made the cultivators' condition pitiable. Every subsequent legislation only strengthened the zamindar's hands. No law was passed to improve the lot of cultivators till the Rent Act of 1859 and the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, which also could offer little relief to the peasants.

Another consequence of the Permanent Settlement was that it helped the interest of the middleman in land making it available to the highest bidder. The result was that the zamindars getting the land from the government on a fixed rent farmed it out to a number of highest bidders so that his earnings went above the dues paid to the government. These 'patnidars' in turn rented it out to a large number of 'dur-patnidar' on increased rents, till the system went down to the actual culti-

55. Hardy, n. 28, p. 43.

56. The Permanent Settlement brought into existence a new class of zamindars i.e. zamindari passed from traditional zamindar families into the hands of the new monied class who prospered under the British. Sinha, n. 2, p. 177.

57. Narahari Kaviraj, *Swadhinata Sangrame Bangla* (Calcutta, 1957), p. 33.

vator. These landed intermediaries, interposed between the cultivator and the zamindar, were not agriculturists themselves but sustained on agricultural income.<sup>58</sup> Since a high percentage of people were dependent on land, the non-agriculturist middlemen and also the zamindars always enforced their own terms: "if one refused to take the land, there were others to bid for it".<sup>59</sup> The rise of the mahajan or money-lender class to whom the cultivators turned in need was another economic growth or the indirect result of the Permanent Settlement.

The economic interests of the non-official Britishers, i.e. planters of indigo during early nineteenth century and those of tea during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, also ruined the cultivators.<sup>60</sup> The dying out of the handloom cotton, silk, and jute industries as a result of the British industrial policy, which discouraged finished products from India, affected the economy of the rural Muslims greatly.<sup>61</sup> Bengal's rural industrial economy was brought to an end.

## V

While peasants and cultivators were pressed to the thin end of their existence by indebtedness, educated Muslims could not find any economic outlet except government service where also they were placed in a disadvantageous position because of their lagging behind the Hindus in English education. Bengali Muslims drew a blank so far as trade and commerce was concerned.<sup>62</sup>

Peasant indebtedness became rather a telling feature of the rural economy of Bengal during the early decades of the twentieth century. "My father, Sir, was born in debt, grew in debt and died in debt. I have inherited my father's debt and

58. Sirajul Islam, 'The Bengal Peasantry in Debt 1904-45' (Paper read in a Seminar on Life and Times of Fazlul Huq at Dacca during November 1973), p. 3.

59. Mullick, n. 2, p. 52.

60. Sinha, n. 2, p. 211.

61. Romesh Dutt, *The Economic History of India*, vol. II, edn. 2, pp. 73-91; K.K. Datta, *Studies in the History of Bengal Subah* (Calcutta, 1936), vol. I, pp. 419-29.

62. Sinha, n. 2, p. 229.

my son will inherit my own" told a Mymensingh peasant in 1929.<sup>63</sup> In Bengal the total agricultural debt in 1928 was Rs. 100 crores.<sup>64</sup> which rose to Rs. 150 crores in 1945.<sup>65</sup>

Indebtedness was a more serious problem for the medium-sized agriculturists who can be termed as agricultural middle class.<sup>66</sup> This class mostly formed of Muslims. C.A. Bentley rightly described : "It is my experience that cultivators who possess assets of any value and who are not themselves the lenders of money to others are invariably in debt."<sup>67</sup> The rural rich formed the village money-lenders' class, almost all of whom were Hindus. It were these economic features, this polarisation between the rich money lending class and the gradually impoverishing borrowing class which influenced the course of Muslim politics during the late twenties and thirties.

The economic grievances of the peasant community against the land owning and money lending class got identified with Muslim politics and became a positive trend in it in the shape of the Praja movement. Though the focal point of this movement was under middle class control, it had a mass base also and talked of economic benefit of peasants and cultivators. This economic orientation of Muslim politics was but a natural

63. Sirajul Islam, n. 58, p. 1.

64. *Report of the Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee 1929-30* (Calcutta, 1930), vol. I, p. 70.

65. Sirajul Islam, n. 58, p. 13. While explaining the causes for this indebtedness, the author says that the need of the Bengal peasants for agricultural credit was more because here droughts, floods, cyclones, epidemics, pestilences, diseases, etc. frequently disturbed their income equilibrium and forced them to borrow. Unlike in other developed economies, they got little or no support from the government in the form of subsidies and loans on easy terms. Hence, they were circumstantially compelled to look to local mahajans for loans at usurious rates of interest. It is well-known that once they were indebted to a mahajan they had no escape.

66. Ibid., p. 7. He quoted F.O. Beil, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Dinaipur 1934-40*, p. 24.

67. "Personal investigations in certain rural areas of Bengal have led me to the following conclusions : Broadly speaking, from the point of view of indebtedness, every village population can be divided into three classes : (a) lenders, (b) borrowers and (c) persons too poor to lend or to borrow." C.A. Bentley's (Director of Public Health, Bengal) evidence before the Royal Commission on Agriculture, p. 240.

growth during the period. It grew in the void created by the failure of the Swarajya Party after C.R. Das's death. In 1928 it took a specific turn in legislative politics during discussion on the Bengal Tenancy Bill when economic polarisation of Muslims and Hindus became complete.<sup>68</sup> This trend was further strengthened during the thirties when a substantial extension of franchise to the rural population under the 1935 Act made the peasants, paying a minimum tax of 6 annas (thirty seven paise) a year, a force in Muslim politics. Whether the peasant interests became a convenient weapon in the hands of the petty-bourgeois leadership or the latter was genuinely interested in advancing them may remain a moot point, the fact that peasant economy gave an economic basis to Muslim politics in Bengal when Jinnah took over leadership of Muslims in India cannot be denied.

The limited share of Muslims in Government service in Bengal, which significantly demonstrated their backwardness, formed a major economic grievance of the emerging Muslim middle class during the thirties of the present century. The Muslim percentage in service fell far short of their percentage in population and did not also correspond to the number of the educated among them. However, along with educational backwardness of Muslims it also became an important factor behind Government policy towards Muslims from the end of the last century.<sup>69</sup>

These two were thus the main economic grievances of the Muslim community in Bengal: the impoverished condition of the Muslim peasantry who were under the thumb of Hindu zamindars and mahajans, and the limited job opportunities available to English educated Muslims in contrast to Hindus. In course of time Muslims began to look upon these as examples of their economic exploitation by the minority community.

## VI

As a result of some of the factors discussed, Bengali Muslims suffered from a crisis of identity. Their effort to

68. This will be discussed more fully in Chapter II.

69. This has been discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

maintain a balance between regional loyalties, i.e. their attachment to Bengali language and culture and their identity as Muslims and the consequent attachment to the Islamic cultural tradition with its Middle-East origin, put a certain strain on them. This transitional period could well be described as a period of confusion in Muslim society. On the one hand, they claimed their identity as the sons of the soil clinging to its language and culture; on the other, they did not like to be described as imitators of Hindus. It cannot be branded as simply a clash between orthodox values and forces of modernisation as happened in Hindu society in Bengal during the early nineteenth century. It was more than that, it was self-assertion of a conscious community in an attempt to define its social, political and economic mores.

The factors stimulating the Muslim search for identity were the social evolution among Hindus during nineteenth century and the corresponding orthodox attitude of the then Muslim elite. Together they shook the foundation of the Hindu-Muslim relationship in Bengal. Till nineteenth century Hindus and Muslims in Bengal lived side by side as peaceful neighbours but maintaining their separate individual and cultural identity and accepting each other as such. The nineteenth century renaissance in Bengal was exclusively Hindu. The three factors which "operated in a quite methodical way to bring into existence the new urban milieu, definitely pro-British", were the Permanent Settlement, English education and business involvement.<sup>70</sup> "A class of society has sprung into existence, that were before unknown, these were placed between aristocracy and the poor and are daily forming a most influential class.... It is a dawn of a new era...<sup>71</sup>." The Western learning through English education which, it is generally regarded, provided the background to the renaissance in Bengal and was the source of all the new forces there, was

70. Sashi Bhushan Choudhury, "The Political Framework" in *Renascent Bengal 1817-1857*, Proceeding of a Seminar organized by the Asiatic Society (Calcutta, 1972), p. 9.

71. Rammohan Roy, *Bengal Herald*, 13 June 1829, quoted in P.C. Ganguly, "Raja Rammohan Roy" in A.C. Gupta, ed., *Studies in Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta, 1958), p. 14.

confined to the rising Hindu middle class till the middle of the last century. The political interests of the wealthy intelligentsia of Bengal lay in the direction of advancing and consolidating their position, status and special interests.<sup>72</sup> This rising Hindu middle class then acted as a buffer between the government and the series of popular anti-British risings in the form of peasant risings, Fakir-Sannyasi revolts, Faraizi-Wahabi movements and the indigo revolts which were directed against the British oppressors and their native allies.

The social, economic and religious ideas generated by this social evolution during the early nineteenth century could not also outgrow the Hindu middle-class orientation. However, there was a difference. The religious and social ideas which Rammohan preached were that of a 'Universal Religion'—the idea of a Supreme Being—whom men of all religions worship. However, at the hands of his followers this 'Universal Religion' i.e. Brahmoism, was given a purely Hindu character and could not also outgrow its middle class complexion.<sup>73</sup> This explains why the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* (1839) which was formed of the elite of mid-nineteenth century Bengal, where religious and social reformers, literary men, orientalist, free thinkers, educationists, journalists, all united for a common purpose, did not include a single Muslim.<sup>74</sup>

This social evolution among Hindus, otherwise called Hindu revivalism, which took back the gaze of enlightened Bengali Hindus to the ancient Hindu period was partly the result of Western education and the researches of British

72. N.K. Bose, *Modern Bengal* (Calcutta, 1959), p. 68. The Indian Society (1843), the British Indian Association (1849), the Indian Association (1876) and the Indian National Congress (1885) either represented the interests of landed aristocracy or those of the rising middle class, and the aim of these organizations was originally to secure no more than equality of treatment with other British subjects and some form of parliamentary government. There were no doubt demands for land reform and popular education, but the focal point was the disability which 'educated' people were subjected to, while the interests of the larger section of the people occupied a secondary position.

73. Jogananda Das, "The Brahmo Samaj", in Gupta, n. 71, pp. 484-6.

74. Dilip Kumar Biswas, "Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore and the Tattvabodhini Sabha"; *ibid.*, p. 36.

historians. The Hindu social mind, thus developed, was ignorant or negligent of the positive aspects of the intervening Muslim period of Indian history. However, although these early nineteenth century Hindu writings glorified ancient Hindu history, they did not display any antagonistic feeling towards Muslims.

In the post-Mutiny period the trend changed and the literature produced by eminent Hindu writers glorified that part of Hindu history which came into clash with Muslim rule. Analysing this trend, Mohammad Maniruzzaman opines that the Sepoy Mutiny brought a change in the attitude of Hindu literates.<sup>75</sup> According to him the British-Hindu-Muslim relationship now became really complicated. The writings of the age, like Rangalal's *Padmini Upakhyan*<sup>76</sup> (following in the footsteps of Lt. Col. James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*) and *Sarasundari* (1868), which in order to glorify the Rajput woman said something uncharitable about Akbar, Dinabandhu Mitra's *Suradhani* (1871), Kavi Nabin Sen's *Palasir Yudhya* (1875), Durga Chand's *Maha Mughal Kabya* (in three parts, 1877), Bankim Chandra's *Durgeshnandini* (1866) invariably showed that to the Hindu mind both Muslims and British were foreigners, but the Muslim rule was more condemnable whose replacement by the British rule was a blessing. Though these poetical works, at the same time, tried to inspire the nation which was under bondage, their appeal never went beyond the Hindu community.

Even leaving aside the controversy whether these were Hindu communal writings or Hindu cultural activities pointing

75. After the mutiny when an English paper of Calcutta demanded that Hindus and Muslims should be equally punished, Iswar Gupta immediately appealed that for a few misguided Hindus it would be unfair to punish the entire community. The same tone was echoed by Syed Ahmad Khan in 1860, in order to protect Muslims saying that Muslims were loyal to the British more than Hindus. Mohammad Maniruzzaman, *Adhunik Bangla Kabye Hindu-Masalman Samparkya* (Dacca, 1970), pp. 20-21.

76. Ibid., p. 64. While mentioning the inspiration behind this book, Rangalal says in the preface that zamindar Kali Chandra Roy Choudhury asked him to write a good historical *Kabya*, and prove to the youth of Bengal who despised native poets that there could be a worthwhile native poet in Bengal who could create *Kabya grantha* glorifying Hindu past by taking material from history.

to social and religious revivalism among them against the onslaught of Christianity, it cannot be denied that the main theme in these writings was the glorification of Hindu power which invariably led to the blackening of Muslim historical characters. The feeling that one's own glory meant blame on others rather became a trait of social and literary development among the Bengali Hindus. This exclusive Hindu attitude had also been demonstrated through the Hindu Mela (1867) organised by the politically motivated Hindu intelligentsia.

The attitude of the contemporary Muslim intelligentsia as reflected in literature and journals also showed the same trend i.e., emphasis only on Islamic idealism from 1870 onwards. According to Anisuzzaman, during the first half of nineteenth century when Persian was the language of educated and aristocratic Muslims in Bengal, *Samachar Sabharajendra* and *Jagaduddipak Bhaskar*, the two journals in Persian, did not claim any separate identity in design or content. But since 1870, after the successful suppression of the Wahabi movement, when Muslim leaders attempted to regenerate Muslim society so that it could cope with modern trends, there was a distinct trend in literary expression towards using Arabic-Persian or Islamic names. The journals edited by Muslims which appeared during the period 1870-1900, without a single exception, had such names like *Mohammadi Akhbar* (1877) *Mussalman* (1884), *Mussalman Bandhu* (1885), *Islam* (1885), *Islam-Pracharak* (1891), *Kohinoor* (1898), *Nur-al Imam* (1900), to quote a few.<sup>77</sup> These journals also tried to look exclusively Muslim in content with varying interest in the ancient civilisations of the Islamic countries in West Asia, like Persia and Arabia, or in the contemporary historical developments in those countries. This trend to look beyond the frontier was quite prominent till the end of the Khilafat movement.<sup>78</sup> Even the historical quest of Bengali Muslim literature centred round the Muslim world, and in the twentieth century when they turned their gaze to Indian history their writing was confined to the Muslim period only.<sup>79</sup>

77. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayik Patra 1831-1930* (Dacca, 1968), Preface, p. 24.

78. Ibid., Preface, p. 27.

79. Ibid., p. 35.



## VII

Side by side with the above trend, there was a distinct and positive trend in Muslim society (though it can be argued how far it was effective) right from the beginning of the twentieth century to define the literary, social, political and economic attitudes of the Bengali Muslims in such a way as to overcome the external influences and to identify them with the culture and language of the land in which they lived. It was an inward looking trend and showed more concern with the conditions of Muslims in Bengal.

*Nabanur*, a Bengali language monthly, appeared in 1903 with the appeal of the editor, Syed Emdad Ali, to "all the Muslim 'sevak' of the Bengali language welcoming them to help in his pious effort". He pointed out that Muslims were backward in everything and that Muslim national life had been paralysed. Only literature could revitalise this down-trodden Muslim society. The editor also said that "the well-being of Bharat depends on the 'sammelan' of the two mahajatis, Hindus and Muslims".<sup>80</sup> In the same year the editor asked that except 'Bangabhasa' what could be the 'matribhasa' of 'Bangiya-Musalman'. Those who wanted to give this place to Urdu were trying for the impossible.<sup>81</sup> In 1915 Mohammad Yakub Ali Choudhury claimed in clearer words: "that Bengali was the matribhasa of Bengali Muslims was as true as sunlight . . . and instead of trying to make this language 'Musalmāni' (i.e. Muslim), it would be hundred times better to make efforts to

80. *Nabanur* (Calcutta), 1st year, no. 1, Baisakh 1310 B.S. (May 1903), editorial quoted in Anisuzzaman, n. 77, p. 68. Mustafa Nurul Islam acclaims it "as one of the first noteworthy Bengali Muslim literary ventures . . . its editorial policy was liberal being aimed at establishing communal harmony via the cultivation of literature." n. 42, Appendix, p. 300. A number of well-known Hindu writers and poets contributed to this journal. However, *Islam-Pracharak* took exception to this saying that though the editor of *Nabanur* was a Muslim, Hindu authors wrote there about their community. Ismail Hussain Sirazi, "Nabanur O Jihad", *Islam Pracharak*, 5th year, no. 11-12, 1310 B.S. (1903).

81. *Nabanur*, 1st year, no. 8, Agrahayan 1310 B.S. (1903), quoted in Anisuzzaman, n. 77, p. 76.

establish 'Musalmani' life and spirit (i.e. Islamic ideals and inspirations) in the realm of Bengali literature."<sup>82</sup>

In 1911 Bengali Muslim literati established 'Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti' with Mohammad Sahidullah as Secretary. This Samiti brought out *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika* and organised a number of Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Sammelans.<sup>83</sup> In his presidential speech at the second conference, Mohammad Sahidullah said that no nation could prosper in the world without cultivating 'matribhasa' and no other language could appeal to the heart except the mother tongue.<sup>84</sup> Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan presiding over the third session in 1918 exclaimed that of the many strange questions in the world one was what was the "matribhasa of the Bangali Musalman, Urdu or Bangla."<sup>85</sup> Identification of the Bengali Muslims with Bengali language and literature was a strong trend in Muslim society as was progressively expressed in their literature. In 1928 a strong protest was raised by both *Mohammadi*<sup>86</sup> and *Sikha* when it was suggested to make Urdu a compulsory subject for Muslim students in Calcutta University. In 1929 Mohammad Sahidullah perhaps echoed the views of the Bengali Muslim literary world when he said that the fact that only Muslims were writers did not mean "Muslim Sahitya". "Muslim

82. Mohammad Yakub Ali Choudhury, "Bangali Mussalman Bhasa O Sahitya", *Kohinoor*, Magh 1322 B.S. (1915); *ibid.*, p. 133. Yakub Ali lamented that till then Bengali Muslim had not taken to Bengali literature. Whatever efforts had been made were limited to the translation of epic literature in Arabic and Urdu and the rest were full of lamentation about their religious and social degradation. They were yet to develop liberal, original, universal ideas which were necessary for the growth of good literature.

83. It was formed by well-known literary figures in the Muslim society who held liberal views. By 1917-18 almost all the Muslims found propagating liberal ideas belonged to it.

84. *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, 1st year. no. 1, Baisakh 1325 B.S. (1918), Anisuzzaman, n. 77, p. 203.

85. *Ibid.*, 1st year, no. 4, Presidential address.

86. Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan criticised the Suhrawardy family of Calcutta saying that they were trying to renew that old quarrel in society by trying to introduce Urdu in Calcutta University syllabus. This would simply finish the Bengali Muslim students. *Masik Mohammadi*, 2nd year, no. 4, Magh 1335, B.S. (1928), editorial.

Sahitya" should portray Muslim society, get its inspiration from the ideals of 'Koran' and 'Hadis', and 'through' this 'Sahitya' Bengali Hindus would know about Bengali Muslims.<sup>87</sup>

During the period 1900-35 a large number of Muslim journals in Bengal (more than a hundred) appeared which established Bengali Muslim claim to Bengali language and literature. These could be grouped into two according to the emphasis in their writings. One trend was to glorify Islam in order to stimulate Muslim society on religious lines. Papers like *Islam Pracharak*, *Islam* and *Al-Eslam* (1915)<sup>88</sup> belonged to this group. The other trend was to build a Bengali Muslim literature by widening the horizon and providing scope to Bengali Muslims for literary activities.<sup>89</sup> However, a section of Muslim writers always felt that even the best Hindu poets and writers depicted Muslim characters unsympathetically and maligned Muslims in order to portray the superiority of Hindus.<sup>90</sup> This objection to the anti-Muslim feeling in *Kabya Kahini* and other writings of Hindus became a strong undercurrent in the Muslim attitude towards Bengali literature as developed by them.<sup>91</sup> In 1903 the editor

87. Mohammad Sahidullah's speech as President of Reception Sub-Committee, Muslim Sahitya Samaj, 3rd session, *Sikha* 3rd year 1929. This Sahitya Samaj was formed of Muslim literati of Dacca in 1926 and *Sikha* appeared as its journal in 1927. In the words of Kazi Abdul Wadud, its aims were to propagate emancipation of the intellect. Kazi Abdul Wadud, *Banglar Jagaran* (Calcutta, 1363 B.S.), p. 194.

88. The editor Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan wrote that *Al-Eslam* had not appeared just to discuss literary subject. It was the journal of Anjuma-e-Ulema Bengal and meant for Islam missionary work, though in the first issue the editor said that its purpose was to serve 'Swadharma', 'Swajati', 'Swadesh' and 'Matribhasa'. *Al-Eslam*, 1st. year, no. 2, Jaistha 1322, B.S. (1915), p. 65.

89. *Nabanur*, *Soltan* (Weekly, 1902), *Saogat* (Monthly, 1918), *Moslem Bharat*, *Masik Mohammadi*, *Sapatahik Mohammadi* (the last two during earlier stages) belonged to this group.

90. S.M. Akbaruddin, "Bartaman Bangla Sahitye Musalmaner Sthan", *Al-Islam*, 2nd year, no. 9, Pous 1323 B.S. (1916), quoted in Nurul Islam, n. 42, p. 145.

91. In a scathing attack on Bankim Chandra in "Sahitya Gurur Bangali Priti" *Al-Islam*, Agrabayana 1325 B.S. (1916) Abul Kalam Shamsuddin wrote: "If he had been a real patriot he would have depicted the glorious character of Mir Kasim (in Chandrasekhar)... (But instead) like a traitor he depicted it in a most heartlessly distorted way... It did not occur to his mind

of *Nabanur* complained that apart from Akshay Babu, Nikhil Babu and Bihari Babu (well-known Hindu poets) it would be difficult to find a single Hindu historian who had treated Muslims as brothers and discussed their glories and faults as such.<sup>92</sup> Even the characters of Rabindranath in *Katha o Kahini* written during Swadeshi Andolan belonged to the Maratha and Sikh history and not to the history of Bengal and everywhere the opposite characters were Muslims.<sup>93</sup> While commenting on Ismail Hossain Siraji's *Roy Nandini*, the editor of *Al-Eslam* commented in 1920 that like some Hindu writers who expressed anti-Muslim feelings in their writings some Muslim writers also expressed anti-Hindu feelings.<sup>94</sup> This trend in Bengali Muslim literature may be taken as signifying Bengali Muslim protest against the assumption of cultural superiority on the part of Hindus.

During the period 1930-35 when talk of further constitutional developments brought polarisation in Bengal politics between Hindus and Muslims, the journals of the time also reflected it. For instance, *Masik Mohammadi* and *Saptahik Mohammadi* wrote strongly in defence of Muslim interests against the views expressed by *Modern Review*, *Prabashi* and *Sanibarar Chiti*.<sup>95</sup>

The Muslim community in Bengal, however, was itself not free from internal antipathies. By the thirties of this century there was within its fold an emerging educated Bengali middle class whose members were distinguished from the then dominant social elite who claimed themselves to be descendants of the ruling dynasties of Arabia, Persia, and Afghanistan. In 1928 Syed Emdad Ali in a scathing attack on this aristocratic

that Muslims were also Bengalis and...were brothers and neighbours to Bengali Hindus." Lastly, the writer commented that "...since he has conceived Muslims to be his enemies, Bengali Muslims consider him a self-interested traitor." *Al-Islam*, Jyaishta, 1324 B.S. (1917), and *Agrahayana*, 1325 B.S. (1918); *ibid.*, p. 146.

92. Editorial, "Musalman Samaje Itihas Charcha", *Nabanur*, 1st year, no. 3, Asardh 1310, B.S., Anisuzzaman, n. 77, p. 71.

93. Mohammad Maniruzzaman, n. 75, p. 280.

94. Anisuzzaman, n. 77, p. 239, note 5.

95. Though *Dhumketu* (half-weekly, 1922 by Kazi Nazrul Islam), *Sikha*, which wanted to bring 'emancipation of Thought' or freedom of ideas tried to tread a different path.

class voiced the sentiment of educated Bengali Muslims saying that in what senses the intelligent, educated, cultured and religious Muslims "born in Bengal" were different from and "inferior to the so-called aristocracy" who came from outside but were uneducated, unsophisticated and devoid of any interest in society. While giving a new definition of 'Ashraf' as a man of religion and good taste whose education and knowledge contributed to the dissemination of knowledge and culture to others, Emdad Ali commented that he would regard the rest as 'Atrafs'.<sup>96</sup> The dominant urge among the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia, however, was to assert their identity as Muslims without giving up their identity as Bengalis.

Muslims' awareness of their socio-economic backwardness, which also inspired their search for an identity, led to polarisation in the Bengali society, i.e. the minority Hindus as socially and culturally dominant and the majority Muslims as socially and culturally backward and feeling subjugated. This considerably influenced the growth of Muslim politics in Bengal, particularly in the twentieth century.

96. Syed Emdad Ali, "Ashraf-Atraf", *Saogat*, seventh year, no. 5, Paus 1336 B.S. (1929).

## CHAPTER II

### EVOLUTION OF MUSLIM POLITICS IN BENGAL : THE EARLY PHASE 1905-1935

The early years of twentieth century are generally regarded as the formative phase of Muslim politics in Bengal. The partition of Bengal in 1905 and formation of the Muslim League in Dacca in the following year are the two most significant events of this period. The partition and its annulment within less than a decade had far-reaching consequences on the shaping of Muslim politics. The creation of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam not only created a new consciousness among Muslims but also stimulated a new hope in them because as a majority community in the new province they benefited most from the British administration. Its subsequent annulment shattered their hopes and aspirations. The first event fostered political consciousness among them and the second further strengthened it.

Bengal was the largest and most populous province in the whole of India. It embraced Bengal proper, Bihar, Chota Nagpur and Orissa with 48 districts spread over an area of nearly 190,000 square miles. It had a population of over 78 millions and a gross revenue of 17 to 18 millions sterling or one-third of the actual revenues of the Indian Empire.<sup>1</sup> The largeness of the province had been attracting the attention of the Government since the later half of nineteenth century. Early in 1903 Sir Andrew Fraser, Governor of Bengal, propounded a scheme "which was the real genesis of the partition of Bengal".<sup>2</sup> The main arguments advanced were that the administration of the territories lying in the eastern section of the province was exceedingly defective and that

1. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Oxford, 1908), vol. II, p. 269.

2. Lovat Fraser, *India Under Curzon and After* (London, 1911), p. 380.

they needed more attention from the Government. It was therefore proposed to attach the districts of Dacca and Mymensingh together with the division of Chittagong to Assam. The proposals were made public on 3 December 1903 in the form of a letter issued by H.H. Risley, Secretary to the Government of India. The chief reasons assigned were, that the Bengal Government needed relief from its excessive burdens, that the outlying districts of the province required more efficient administration and that Assam should have an outlet to the sea which it would find at Chittagong.<sup>3</sup>

The publication of Risley's letter did not go without protests. "The Government wishes to weaken the Bengali nation by placing it under two administrations"<sup>4</sup>, wrote the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* while the *Bengalee* described it as a manifestation of the policy of divide and rule.<sup>5</sup> *Dacca Prakash* commented that it was a sinister attempt to divide the Bengali nation.<sup>6</sup> The people of Bengal, more particularly of East Bengal, immediately raised their voice against the partition scheme. "It is said that about 500 meetings were held in Dacca, Mymensingh and Chittagong during December 1903 and January 1904. All people, irrespective of class, creed and community, joined these protest meetings.

The initial opposition to partition was thus universal. Not a single meeting was held, nor a pamphlet issued in favour of the proposal. There was no distinction between the attitude of Hindus and that of Muslims of Bengal.<sup>7</sup> This led the Government to adopt measures to arouse public sentiment in the area in favour of the partition scheme.<sup>8</sup>

It was at this stage that Muslim politics in Bengal took a new turn. Nawab Salimullah emerged as leader of the Muslim community in Bengal, especially of East Bengal. He supported

3. P. Mukherjee, ed., *All About Partition* (Calcutta, 1906), p. 7.

4. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 14 December 1903.

5. *The Bengalee*, 15 January 1904.

6. *Dacca Prakash*, 27 December 1903.

7. For Muslim opposition to the partition proposal please see Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884-1912* (Dacca, 1974) pp. 248-49.

8. The official sources claimed that the partition scheme emerged from public opinion and public discussion and not from the Government. Earl of Ronaldshay, *The Life of Lord Curzon* (London, 1928), vol. II, p. 325.

the partition scheme and organised a movement in its favour. Lord Curzon himself toured East Bengal in February 1904. He addressed public meetings at Chittagong, Dacca and Mymensingh. Speaking at Dacca on 18 February 1904, he declared :

Partition would make Dacca the centre and possibly the capital of a new and self-sufficing administration which must give to the people of these districts by reason of their numerical strength and their superior culture the preponderating voice in the province so created, which would invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussalman Viceroys and Kings.<sup>9</sup>

From this it was clear that the government was going to show special favour to Muslims of East Bengal by creating a new Muslim majority province. The motive, of course, was not merely administrative, but also political from the very start. Both Fraser and Risley had conceived partition as a 'counterblast to extremism'.<sup>10</sup> At that stage, however, there was no consideration of the special interests of Muslims. It was only now that it was put forward as one of the arguments

9. *Curzon Speeches*, Vol. III, pp. 303-4. On the previous day, 17 February 1904, Curzon wrote in a letter to the Secretary of State, Brodrick : "The Bengalis who like to think themselves a nation, and who dream of future, when English would have been turned out, and a Bengali Babu will be installed in Government House, Calcutta, of course, bitterly resent any disruption that will be likely to interfere with the realisation of this dream. If we are weak enough to yield to their demand now, we shall not be able to dismember Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying, on the eastern flank of India, a force almost formidable, and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in future." *Curzon Papers—Private Correspondence of the Viceroy with the Secretary of State*, dated 17 February 1904. Microfilm National Archives of India. It clearly shows the way Lord Curzon's mind was working.

10. Fraser was convinced that certain districts of Bengal had become 'a hotbed of purely Bengali movement, unfriendly, if not seditious, in character'. Risley believed that the preponderance of Bengalis in provincial politics was 'most desirable' to diminish. Amales Tripathi, *Extremist Challenge* (Calcutta, 1967), p. 94.



in favour of partition. The purpose was clearly to weaken opposition to the partition plan by weaning away Muslims from it. In the beginning this move did not meet with resounding success. Immediately after the official announcement of partition (4 July 1905 in London and 7 July 1905 in Simla), for instance, protest meetings were held all over Bengal, both west and east, and were attended by Muslims as well as Hindus.<sup>11</sup>

Writing in *Nabanur* in October 1905, Ekinuddin Ahmad said that "Musalmans in one opinion are protesting against this proposal of Lat Bahadur". He pointed out that although the 'Lat Saheb' had said that in the new province Muslims would be in a majority, the latter were not happy at this.<sup>12</sup> In an illuminating article on 'Swadeshi Andolan' in the same journal, Mohammad Hedayetullah wrote:

It would not be possible to destroy or dissolve the unity which exists here between Hindus and Musalmans because of good neighbourliness. In whatever ways the foreigner may try to bring disunity among us, this unity, this synthesis cannot go. However, it is better to accept that this feeling of unity has recently become weak. The reason for this is lack of love....

In whatever way the English might have helped us in our development their policy of 'divide and rule' has done us the greatest harm.<sup>13</sup>

However, when the bright prospects of the partition scheme were realised by the articulate section of the Muslim society of Calcutta and East Bengal many among them began to support it. The changed character of the Swadeshi

11. Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-8* (Calcutta, 1973), pp. 426-34, has underlined Muslim participation "in virtually every aspect of Swadeshi Movement" in its early phase.

12. Ekinuddin Ahmad, 'Banger Angachched', *Nabanur*, 3rd year, no. 6, Aswin 1312 B.S. (1905). The original passage quoted in Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Sekaler Patra* (Dacca, 1969), p. 98.

13. *Nabanur*, 3rd year, no. 7, Kartik 1312 B.S. (November 1905); *ibid.*, p. 100.

movement also played its part in this development. As the movement gathered momentum it increasingly acquired symbols associated with Hinduism. It became quite common, for instance, to take the vow of Swadeshi before goddess Kali. "The blending of nascent extremism with social revivalism", which the Swadeshi movement represented through the years 1906-8<sup>14</sup>, inspired many Hindus and was in part responsible for widening its base, but it failed to evoke a positive response among other sections of the Bengali society and contributed towards the alienation of Muslims.

Thus the *Muslim Chronicle*, which had earlier opposed the partition proposal, now wished the new province and its people happiness and prosperity.<sup>15</sup> In October 1905 the Mohammedan Literary Society of Calcutta issued a manifesto signed by several prominent Muslims urging Muslims to be faithful to the government and to support it in every possible way.<sup>16</sup>

On 16 October 1905, the day the partition scheme was given effect to, Nawab Salimullah called a Mohammedan Provincial Conference at Dacca. In his presidential address he remarked that partition had aroused the Muslims "from inaction and directed our attention to activities and struggle", and hinted that organized attempts were to be made to popularize the cause of partition among the Muslim masses.<sup>17</sup> The conference hailed the decision of the Government to create the new province and the appointment of Sir Bampfylde Fuller as its first Lt.-Governor. It formed a new organization called Mohammedan Provincial Union, with Nawab Salimullah as its Patron, with the object of "uniting the Mohammedans of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam" into a compact body and representing to the government the views and aspirations of Muslims in social and political matters.<sup>18</sup> This appears to have been the first attempt to consolidate Muslims of Bengal on a political platform.

14. Sarkar, n. 11, p. 48.

15. *Muslim Chronicle*, 16 October 1905.

16. *Ibid.*, 21 October 1905.

17. *The Statesman*, 18 October 1905.

18. *Muslim Chronicle*, 21 October 1905.

Through his stronghold at Dacca Nawab Salimullah was in an ideal position to start an agitation in East Bengal in favour of partition. On Fuller's resignation<sup>19</sup> he organized a meeting at Dacca which passed a resolution saying that by accepting Fuller's resignation "a great injustice" had been done to Muslims who formed two-thirds of the population of the new province, and that his had been "a just, sagacious and sympathetic administration". The resolution further said that "the Muslims of the new province beg to record their disapproval of the system of Government which maintains no continuity of policy".<sup>20</sup> The attempts of the Nawab of Dacca to popularize partition among the Muslim masses bore results, particularly in East Bengal and Assam. The first anniversary of partition on 16 October 1906 was observed by Muslims of Eastern Bengal as a day of happiness and rejoicing.

Muslims did not limit their activities to organizing meetings in favour of partition. They strongly protested against the way boycott had been forced on Muslims through "... the services of landlords and their agents which were requisitioned to enforce boycott at the cost of breaches of peace and Hindu-Muslim riots".<sup>21</sup> In a meeting at Sirajganj (Pabna District) resolutions were passed alleging that Muslims were oppressed by Hindu zamindars and money-lenders.

The pro-partition enthusiasm among Muslims of Eastern Bengal and the activities of the Swadeshi enthusiasts were responsible for some of the communal riots which broke out in the new province, though not in other parts of Bengal. In 1906 Hindu papers reported that *Mullas*—agents of Salimullah—were spreading the separatist message through the countryside in the form of 'Swajati Andolan' and the famous pamphlet 'Lal Istahar' called for a movement whereby Muslims would

19. Fuller resigned in August 1906 due to differences of opinion with the Government of India on some of the measures which he had taken to suppress the Swadeshi movement.

20. *Eastern Bengal and Assam Era*, 11 August 1906, p. 4.

21. Z.H. Zaidi, "The Partition of Bengal and its Annulment—A Survey of the Scheme of Territorial Redistribution of Bengal 1902-1911", (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London, 1964) p. 191.

totally boycott Hindus.<sup>22</sup>

Thus there is no doubt that partition led to the emergence of Hindu-Muslim tension in Bengal. For the first time, Hindus and Muslims became diametrically opposed on political issue and the economic grievances of the Muslim community in Bengal got a political outlet. In an article "Rajniti Kshetre Hindu-Musalman", Lehajuddin Ahmed criticised the few Muslims who were asking their co-religionists to join the Congress : "... they without considering the future are being cheated ... when the time will come for 'the Survival of the fittest' then it is very doubtful whether in politics Muslim existence will be traceable".<sup>23</sup> Muslim opposition to the anti-partition movement no doubt enraged the Hindus, but Rabindranath Tagore described the root of the problem when he remarked : "Why the Muslims could not become one with us in our agony is due to the reason that we never allowed our hearts to unite with theirs".<sup>24</sup>

## II

The formation of the All India Muslim League in 1906 at Dacca was partly the result of the agitation for and against partition. This was of course preceded by the Simla deputation on 1 October 1906. The move for that deputation was initiated by Mohsin-ul-Mulk, Secretary of Aligarh College, who wrote to Archbold and requested him to arrange for the reception of a Muslim deputation by the Viceroy. It is, however, significant that the situation in Bengal figured prominently among the factors which led Mohsin-ul-Mulk to take this initiative. As he wrote in his letter to Archbold :

I find that Mohammedan feeling is very much changed, and I am constantly getting letters using emphatic

22. *The Hitavadi*, 3 February 1907 ; *Sanjibani*, 20 December 1906 quoted in Sarkar, n. 11, p. 446. The full text of the pamphlet had been reprinted in *The Bengalee*, 5 May 1907.

23. *Nabanur*, 3rd year, no. 3, Asard 1312 B.S., quoted in Anisuzzaman, n. 12, p. 94.

24. Rabindranath Tagore, "Kalantar", *Rabindra Rachanabali Janma-satabarsiki Sanskaran* (Calcutta, 1961), p. 40.

language, and saying that the Hindus have succeeded owing to their agitation, and the Mohammedans have suffered for their silence. The Mohammedans have generally begun to think of organizing a political association and forming themselves into political agitators.... The Mohammedans of Eastern Bengal have received a severe shock. I have got a letter from Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury of Dacca who gives utterance to the extremely sorrowful feeling prevailing there. He says : '... up till now the Mohammedans of Bengal have been careless. They have now begun to feel the consequences of their carelessness. If only the Mohammedans of Bengal, instead of following the Government, had agitated like the Hindus and had enlisted the sympathies of the Mohammedans of the whole of India, and raised their voice up to the Parliament, they would never have seen these unfortunate consequences....'<sup>25</sup>

Nawab Salimullah and Syed Nawab Ali Choudury of Mymensingh tried to make partition an all-India issue. They were in constant correspondence with Mohsin-ul-Mulk and Archbold pleading for their help. In his letter dated 9 August 1906 to Dunlop Smith, Archbold wrote :

The Dacca Mohammedans are very much interested in the matter we are talking of, and will certainly join in any deputation of the kind suggested in the Nawab's letter, we have had a good deal of communication with them of late . . . when I read of the meetings and uneasiness in Dacca and saw the names of those concerned, I was very anxious to suggest the deputation as a solvent of the difficulties there, as well as possibly elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

25. Mohsin-ul-Mulk to Archbold, 4 August 1906, Eur. MSS. D. 573/8, enclosure Archbold to Dunlop Smith, 22 August 1906, Minto Papers, Correspondence, vol. 2, no. 55. Text also given in Syed Razi Wasti, *Lord Minto and Indian National Movement* (London, 1960), pp. 61-68.

26. Archbold to Dunlop Smith, 9 August 1906, Minto Papers, Correspondence, vol. 2, no. 40.

The Bengali Muslim leaders insisted that partition should be incorporated in the address to be presented to Minto and even threatened that in case this was not done they would not join the deputation. On the other hand, Mian Mohammed Shafi and Justice Shah Din asserted that no such controversial matter should be included. The Aga Khan also refused to join the deputation if any controversial issue like the partition of Bengal was included.<sup>27</sup> This marred the prospect of making the partition of Bengal an issue for the Muslim community in India as a whole, but Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, the pro-partition leader in East Bengal, joined the deputation. Nawab Salimullah, who originally intended to join it, could not do so for personal reasons.<sup>28</sup>

The Simla deputation represented the Aligarh school of thought whose core word was loyalty to the British. It demanded that Muslims should get separate representation as a distinct community and that their representation should be "commensurate not merely with their numerical strength but also with political importance and the value of contribution which they make to the defence of the Empire". Consideration should also be paid "to the position which they occupied in India a little more than a hundred years ago and of which the traditions have naturally not faded from their minds."<sup>29</sup>

Although failing in his attempt to make the partition of Bengal an issue in the address to the Viceroy, Nawab Salimullah made a move in a new direction. It is, of course, true that already there was a discussion among the members of the Simla Deputation about an independent organization of Muslims.<sup>30</sup> But it was Nawab Salimullah who took the initiative and issued a circular in early December 1906 to all leading Muslims of India and also gave it to the press for publication. He was

27. Mohammed Noman, *Muslim India* (Allahabad, 1942), pp. 74-75.

28. Matiur Rehman, *From Consultation to Confrontation: A Study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics 1906-1912* (London, 1970), p. 8.

29. G. Allana, ed., *Pakistan Movement: Historic Documents* (Karachi, n.d.), p. 7.

30. In a letter to Dunlop Smith dated 29 October 1906 the Aga Khan states "I have asked all the members of the Simla Deputation to form into a permanent committee." Minto Papers, Correspondence, vol. 2, no. 126.

not satisfied with the trend of discussions at Simla about the formation of a Muslim organization and stated in clear terms what he thought about the proposed All-India Muslim Confederacy. The circular letter stated :

It is absolutely necessary that the aims and objects of this Association should be definitely stated. And although I am sure I shall not receive the hearty support of some of my co-religionists, yet—for one honestly believes that time has come when, if the Association is to be a force and power for good, it must at the very outset lay down its policy and object and I would do so as follows :

That the sole object and purpose of the association shall be to, whenever possible, support all measures emanating from the government and to protect the cause and advance the interests of our co-religionists throughout the country.

To controvert the growing influence of the so-called Indian National Congress, which has a tendency to misinterpret and subvert the British Rule in India or which may lead to that deplorable situation, and

To enable our young men of education, who for want of such an association have joined the Congress camp, to find scope, on account of their fitness and ability for public life.<sup>31</sup>

The annual Mohammedan Educational Conference held at Dacca in December that year provided the Nawab with the opportunity to call the meeting at Dacca. He had seen the potentiality of young Fazlul Huq, the man who was destined to play a unique role in the future history of Bengal. The latter worked hard to help organise the Muslim political association under the guidance of Nawab Salimullah.<sup>32</sup>

At the conclusion of the session of the Mohammedan Educational Conference, the leaders held a meeting at Sahabag

31. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 13 December 1906 ; *The Englishman* (Calcutta), 16 December 1906.

32. 'Sher-e-Bangla Supplement', *Pakistan Observer*, 27 April 1967.

under the presidentship of Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk on 30 December 1906. In this meeting the crucial resolution moved by Nawab Salimullah and supported by Hakim Ajmal Khan was unanimously passed :

Resolved that this meeting composed of Mussalmans from all parts of India assembled at Dacca decide that a political association be formed, styled the All India Muslim League, for the furtherance of the following objects : (a) To promote among the Mussalmans of India feelings of loyalty to the British Government and to remove any misconception that may arise as to the intention of the government with regard to any of the measures; (b) to protect and advance the political right and interests of the Mussalmans of India and to respectfully represent their needs and aspirations to the Government; (c) to prevent the rise among the Mussalmans of any feelings of hostility towards other communities without prejudice to the other objects of the League.<sup>33</sup>

Nawab Salimullah initiated the move for such a political association as he badly needed support to popularize the cause of partition. It was, therefore, quite natural for the League to adopt a resolution at its first meeting which declared "that the partition is sure to prove beneficial to the Mohammedan community which constitutes the vast majority of that Province, and that all such methods of agitation as boycotting should be strongly condemned and discouraged".<sup>34</sup> Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk and Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk were elected Joint Secretaries and a provisional committee of sixty members was appointed to draft a constitution. The committee included three leaders from Bengal, Nawab Ali Chowhury, Nawab Salimullah and Moulvi Himayat-ud-din.

Thus came into being the political body which was to play a decisive role in shaping not only the destiny of Indian

33. Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, *Foundations of Pakistan : All India Muslim League Documents 1906-47* (Karachi, n.d.), vol. I, p. 15.

34. *The Englishman*, 31 December 1906.



Muslims, but also the entire course of political development of the sub-continent. The Nawab of Dacca had undoubtedly been the prime mover behind this development. The first regular session of the All India Muslim League was held at Karachi on 29 and 30 December 1907 under the presidentship of Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy of Bombay. The constitution of the League was adopted at this session. It was decided that its membership would be distributed among different provinces according to a fixed proportion. Members of the Simla Deputation and members of the Provisional Committee at Dacca were included in the first list. The session of the League adjourned after adopting the constitution and reassembled at Aligarh on 18 March 1908. The formation of the League was completed at this session with the election of the Aga Khan as President and Major Syed Hussian Bilgrami as Secretary. The quotas for different provinces for the central committee were fixed and members elected accordingly.

The Bengal Provincial Muslim League was established at Dacca in 1907 under the presidentship of the Nawab of Dacca. The Nawab took upon himself the responsibility of popularizing the aims and objects of the League and organizing public opinion in favour of partition in Eastern Bengal. Meetings were held in different parts of Eastern Bengal and the support of the League for the new province was voiced. At the same time the Nawab utilized both the new organization and the new administration to strengthen his own leadership.

The policy which the Nawab initiated worked well for some time. He could convince the people of the utility of his policy which was apparently paying rich dividends. In the new province, Muslims were preferred in Government service on the ground that they held only 15.5 per cent of government jobs though Muslim literates formed 41.13 per cent of the total number of the literate people there.<sup>35</sup> This helped the Nawab in getting many of his followers employed in Government service. The Government recognized the Bengal

35. Lyon, Chief Secretary, Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Circular no. 5221-3c dated 25 May 1906 on Muslims in Civil Service, published in *The Bengalee*, 13 June 1906.

Provincial Muslim League as the political association competent to speak on all matters concerning Muslim interests. But soon the Nawab was deprived of the very base of this strategy by the annulment of partition in 1911.

### III

By 1910 official opinion both in Calcutta and London was convinced of the strength of the opposition to partition and became more and more concerned with the continuing discontent and unrest on that issue. Lord Hardinge, who succeeded Lord Minto as Viceroy on 23 November 1910, particularly shared this concern. He suggested to Lord Crew, the Secretary of State, that instead of Calcutta, Delhi should be made the seat of the Government of India and that the five Bengali-speaking divisions of Bengal (Presidency, Burdwan, Dacca, Rajshahi and Chittagong) constituted into a province under a Governor-in-Council. The non-Bengali speaking areas on the other hand were to be separated under a new Lt.-Governorship with headquarters at Patna. Assam was to be converted into a chief-commissionership.<sup>36</sup> The official announcement incorporating these suggestions, was made by King George V at the Delhi Durbar in December 1911.

The annulment of partition gave a rude shock to Muslims in Bengal. The creation of the new province had turned the Muslim elite there into active supporters of British rule and they had derived many benefits from this policy. Muslims, therefore, by and large regarded the annulment as "the deprivation of those splendid opportunities at self-improvement" of a community that was clearly in need of help.<sup>37</sup> They now felt quite indignant. "If we are silent and less vocal our silence is the silence of anger and not that of acquiescence", wrote

36. Zaidi maintains that the question of conferring some boon on the King's visit to capture the imagination of the people influenced the annulment decision more than anything else. n. 21, p. 226.

37. Presidential speech of Nawab of Dacca at the session of the All India Muslim League in Calcutta in March 1912, Pirzada, n. 33, p. 237.

Suhrawardy to Curzon.<sup>38</sup> The Nawab of Dacca in particular was very much perturbed as he was not consulted before the decision was taken though he was functioning as a kind of non-official adviser to the Government.

The Muslim elite in Bengal now lost faith in British promises. Thus set in a definite anti-British feeling in the Bengali Muslim mind.<sup>39</sup> The meeting which Nawab Salimullah called on 30 December 1911 at Dacca to consider the situation arising out of the annulment of partition was attended even by Abdur Rasul, Moulvi Abdul Majid and Khwaja Atikullah, notable Muslim leaders who had joined the anti-partition movement. Abdur Rasul proposed that the headquarters of the Provincial Muslim League be shifted from Dacca to Calcutta. The meeting decided to send a deputation of Bengal Muslims to the Viceroy. This deputation waited on the Viceroy on 3 February 1912 and was assured by the latter that the Governor of Bengal would camp at Dacca annually when he would be accessible to the people of East Bengal and would look after the interests of Muslims. It was also announced that a university would soon be established at Dacca.

The change in the Muslim attitude in Bengal coincided with a similar change on the all-India plane. By 1910 there had emerged a group of Muslim politicians who were keen on India's political advancement and felt that in the changed circumstances there was no justification for Muslims to keep themselves aloof from the general political life in the country.<sup>40</sup> Syed Nabiullah, presiding over the annual session of All India Muslim League at Nagpur in December 1910, urged Muslims to develop self-reliance. This reflected a new trend in Muslim thinking as a result of the changes taking place in Iran and Turkey and the growth of Pan-Islamic feelings among Indian Muslims, making them more and more suspicious of British

38. Abdulla-al-Mamun Suhrawardy to Curzon, 28 February 1912. See also Amir Ali to Curzon, 4 January 1912. Zaidi, n. 21, pp. 306-7.

39. For a detailed discussion of Muslim reaction to the annulment of partition, see Rehman, n. 28, pp. 237-50.

40. Speech of Hakim Ajmal Khan, Chairman of Reception Committee, at the annual session of All India Muslim League held in January 1910 at Delhi. Pirzada, n. 33, p. 90.

imperialism. This trend was strengthened further by the annulment of partition. Now several Muslim leaders began to emphasize the necessity for a reappraisal of the Muslim policy to suit the changing times. This demand was voiced at the annual session in March 1912 at Calcutta under the presidentship of the Nawab of Dacca. The fact that the Nawab of Dacca presided over the meeting and that the League resolutions on the revocation of partition and on the Dacca University scheme were initiated by the young and liberal members of the League symbolised this new trend.<sup>41</sup>

Thus there started a reorientation of Muslim politics, which was accelerated by the Balkan War of 1912 and the general British policy towards the Ottoman Empire. The agitation on the Balkan issue for the first time united the different sections of Muslims and led to a reversal of Sir Syed Ahmad's policy of eschewing anti-government politics and of 'toadism' followed by the leaders who supported him.<sup>42</sup> To change the aims and objectives of the League the Council of All India Muslim League held a meeting on 31 December 1912 and drafted a new constitution which was adopted at the new Lucknow session on 22 March 1913. The most important changes were that the League now adopted 'self-government' as its goal and accepted the need for periodical meetings between leaders of both communities to find out the *modus operandi* for joint action.<sup>43</sup>

In Bengal also there was a change in leadership. Nawab

41. Rehman, n. 28, p. 253.

42. Ibid.

43. The goal of the All India Muslim League was defined as : "Attainment under the aegis of the British Crown of a system of self-government suitable to India through constitutional means, by bringing about, amongst others, a steady reform of the existing systems of administration by promoting national unity, by fostering public spirit among the people of India, and by cooperating with other communities for the said purpose." The other resolution ran as follows : "The All India Muslim League places on record its firm belief that future development and the progress of the people of India depend on the harmonious working and cooperation of the various communities and hopes that leaders of both sides will periodically meet together to find a *modus operandi* for joint and concerted action in questions of public good." Allana, n. 29, pp. 24-25.

Salimullah almost resigned himself to fate and died in January 1915. In 1912 the Bengal Presidency Muslim League was established at Calcutta.<sup>44</sup> The young and radical group of Bengal Muslim leaders who asserted themselves at the Calcutta (March 1912) session of the All India Muslim League became rather prominent.<sup>45</sup> Fazlul Huq provided leadership to this radical section inside the Muslim League. He had his education in Calcutta and was closer to advanced political ideas of his times.<sup>46</sup> He became Secretary of the Bengal Presidency Muslim League in 1915.

The war which broke out in 1914 put a strain on Muslim loyalty to the British. Muslims felt concerned at the British attitude towards Turkey and tried to obtain promises that no action would be taken against the sacred seat of Khilafat. The war also raised hopes of constitutional advancement and emphasized the need of Hindu-Muslim unity. Already a note towards this had been struck at the Lucknow session of the League in 1913.

Fazlul Huq and Surendra Nath Bannerjee entered into correspondence with leaders of the League and the Congress to produce a joint reform scheme acceptable to both. Their annual sessions were held at Bombay in December 1915 simultaneously. The Congress authorised the All India Congress Committee to frame a scheme of reforms and to confer with the Committee of the League for the purpose. Accordingly, the AICC in consultation with the Reforms Committee of the League prepared a scheme which was adopted at the Lucknow session of the two organizations in December 1916.

M.A. Jinnah presided over the League session at Lucknow.

44. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 9A-2 (1-8) Proceedings, nos. 202-209, June 1913. The names of a large number of associations formed by Muslims appeared in the list of associations recognized in 1912. Most of them were established earlier, but applied in 1912 only which proves that the agitation against partition and its annulment brought home to the Bengali Muslim mind the need for organized political activities through association to fight and gain a cause.

45. Rehman, n. 28, p. 242.

46. Kalipada Biswas, *Yukta Banglar Sesh Adhyay* (Calcutta, 1966) pp. 1-55. The author has made an objective appreciation of Fazlul Huq as the leader of the Muslims of Bengal.

A. Rasul of Bengal moved the resolution on the reform scheme which was seconded by Fazlul Huq.<sup>47</sup> This Congress-League scheme, better known as the Lucknow Pact, accepted separate electorates for Muslims and provided safeguards for minorities in provincial legislatures. Muslims were given weightage in the five provinces where they were in a minority and, on the same principles, Hindus were given better representation in Bengal and Punjab where they were in a minority. The Lucknow Pact was a victory for the radicals in the Muslim League. It also marked the start of Hindu-Muslim collaboration in Bengal politics which was continued by C.R. Das in the twenties.

The Lucknow Pact was, however, denounced by a large section of Muslims in Bengal, notably the followers of the late Nawab of Dacca and Nawab Ali Chowdhury of Mymensingh. They felt that the interests of Bengali Muslims had been sacrificed to reach a compromise with Hindus at an all-India level. There is no doubt that if viewed exclusively from the point of view of Bengali Muslims, the Lucknow Pact could not appear to have dealt fairly with their interests. For with a population of 52.6 per cent, Muslims in Bengal were to get only 40 per cent of the elected seats in the Legislative Council. Nawab Ali Chowdhury, who was then East Bengal's representative in the Imperial Legislative Council, assumed leadership of the dissident section of Muslims and resigned in 1917 from presidentship of the Bengal Presidency Muslim League. Many others also left it. The Lucknow Pact thus led to a crisis in Muslim politics in Bengal.<sup>48</sup>

Nawab Ali Chowdhury now began to function mainly through the Central National Muhammadan Association and was elected its President in August 1918. Shortly thereafter,

47. *Indian Review*, January 1917, pp. 16 and 45. The resolution *inter alia* said : "the All India Muslim League, while adopting the scheme of reform prepared by the Reforms Committee of the League and approved by its Council, submits it in conjunction with the Indian National Congress to the Government for its introduction after the war as the first step towards the establishment of complete self-government in India."

48. J.H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society Twentieth Century Bengal* (Bombay, 1968), pp. 116-18.

the Secretary of State was to appoint two committees, one on franchise and the other on division of functions. The Association made it its main task to demonstrate before the Franchise Committee that the Muslim League had no right to speak for Muslims in Bengal. It asserted that Muslims would not agree to any scheme of 'progressive realisation of self-government'. It maintained that Muslims formed a majority in Bengal and should be given representation accordingly. It spoke of apprehensions among Muslims about the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals and their despair at the inadequate representation provided for them in the Provincial Legislature.<sup>49</sup> Throughout 1919 Nawab Ali Choudhury organized meetings in different parts of Bengal to influence official opinion at Delhi and to demonstrate to them that the Muslim League was not representative of the Muslim opinion in Bengal. Unmindful of this opposition, the Bengal Muslim League under Fazlul Huq collaborated with the Congress on the question of India's advance towards self-government on the basis of Hindu-Muslim unity. The Congress and the League held special sessions in Bombay in August 1918, presided over by Hasan Imam and the Raja Saheb of Mahmudabad respectively, and reaffirmed the principle of reform contained in the Congress-League scheme. This was followed by the annual sessions of the Congress and the League held in Delhi in December 1918. Presiding over the League session, Fazlul Huq declared : "The success that has crowned British Arms has brought to the minds of Indians a national pride and high expectation. Let us hope that the expectation will be justified and these hopes amply fulfilled by the introduction into India of a real measure of self-government."<sup>50</sup>

#### IV

The discussion at the League session was devoted largely to the fate of Turkey and treatment of the Muslim world at the coming peace conference. The resolution passed by it expressed the grave concern of Indian Muslims about the

49. Government of Bengal, Home Appointment Proceedings A, nos. 10-19, March 1919.

50. *Indian Review*, Janury 1919, p. 43.

future of the Sultan of Turkey who was also the Caliph of all Muslims. For the Congress the year 1919 started with signs of an open conflict with the government on the question of the Rowlatt Bill and the Jallianwalla Bagh tragedy. By 1920 the terms of the Treaty with Turkey as well as the report of the Hunter Commission were made public. The whole of India reacted very sharply towards these and acting under Gandhi's leadership, the Congress launched a non-co-operation movement which was to continue till the Khilafat wrong was righted and India attained Swaraj.

In Bengal, as in the rest of India, the Khilafat-non-co-operation movement became a mass movement in which both Hindus and Muslims participated. The end of war had led to the release of Khilafat leaders like Abul Kalam Azad and Mohammad Ali. Azad toured the different villages in Bengal. Of the Bengali Muslim leaders Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan, Secretary of the Anjuman Ulema, Bengal, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Mujibur Rahman Khan (editor, *Mussalman*), Maulana Abdullah-el-Baqi (Rajshahi) took active part in the movement. The first two toured different parts of Bengal and organized a large number of meetings, particularly in Dacca and Chittagong.<sup>51</sup> In an article "Asahojogita-o-Amader Kartabya", Mohammad Maniruzzaman said that to protect Khilafat and to acquire Swaraj were the two aims of the movement and every Indian should support this.<sup>52</sup>

To propagate the Khilafat cause, Khilafat Committees, as distinct from the already existing Congress Committees, were established in most of the districts of Bengal, but this did not lead to any clash between them as both had the same immediate objective.<sup>53</sup> In most of those districts, including those of East Bengal, all important leaders were in both groups of committees. District conferences, meetings and processions were organised by them jointly. The Muslim press played an

51. *Al-Eslam*, 6th year, no. 9, Paus 1327 B.S. (1921), p. 64.

52. *Ibid.*, 6th year, no. 10, Magh 1327 B.S., pp. 3-4.

53. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 8A-1, Proceedings B, no. 143, 8 September 1923. In 1923 the following Muslims were in the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mohammad Akram Khan, Mujibur Rahman, Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmad, Maulana Abdur Rahman and Haji Abdur Rashid.



important role in the movement along with the Hindu press. This was the first anti-British mass movement in which both the communities had joined hands. The *Mussalman*, (editor Mujibur Rahman), *Mohammadi* and *Al-Eslam* (in Bengali and editor for both Akram Khan) propagated the cause of the non-co-operation-Khilafat movement throughout 1920-23.

The *Mussalman* in particular played a very active role in cementing Hindu-Muslim unity. The following extract from one of its editorials illustrates this role :

Indian unity, real and lasting, must be based on mutual toleration and mutual love. A unity brought about merely by a policy of give and take—of one community making a concession in favour of another and vice-versa—will only be show of unity without any reality; it is sure to have a very ephemeral existence, it may be useful for a time for the attainment of some political object. Toleration as we have said will be the basis of that unity, but unfortunately there are men even in the fold of the Nationalists, Hindus and Muslims, who have a very narrow conception of Indian unity.<sup>54</sup>

This is a true reflection of the dominant feeling in both the communities. As far as the Muslims were concerned there is no doubt that it had a great impact on them. It contributed to the growth of political consciousness among them, made them anti-British and nurtured in them a spirit of defiance of authority. Under the leadership of men like C.R. Das, Maulana Azad and Maulana Akram Khan, it became a mass movement. Even the remote villages in Bengal which never had any taste of political activity, were visited by non-co-operators and items like spinning and boycott of courts and schools were taken up enthusiastically by the people.

## V

The sudden end of the non-co-operation movement in February 1922 brought about a change in the political atmosphere of Bengal as in that of the rest of the country. Muslim

54. *Mussalman*, editorial, 16 February 1923.

society had been highly excited over the Khilafat issue and the failure of the movement created great resentment among Muslims. The centuries old religious tolerance was forgotten and questions like 'music before mosques' and 'cow-killing' came to influence the community's relations with Hindus.

It was in this atmosphere that Hindus in upper India started the *Shudhi* and *Sangathan* movements in 1923 and the Muslims started *Tabligh* and *Tanzeems* in return.<sup>55</sup> This led to a further deterioration in Hindu-Muslim relations all over the country. Bengal was not unaffected by this trend. The extremist Muslim and Hindu press took up the cause of their respective communities, published all divisive news with exaggeration and vitiated the atmosphere. The acute tension between the two communities manifested itself in a series of riots. Almost everywhere the riots began on the question of music before mosque during Hindu processions or cow killing at Bakr-Id. The first factor had been absent during the riots that took place in the first two decades of this century, including the serious riot in Calcutta in September 1918.<sup>56</sup>

In the meanwhile, C.R. Das who came out of prison on 9 August 1922 suggested the Council entry programme at the Gaya session of the Congress in 1922 as he feared that the forces let loose by the movement would lead to extremism, both social and political, if he did not offer any active programme. His failure to secure majority support for this programme in the Congress led him to form the Congress-Khilafat Swarajya Party in collaboration with Motilal Nehru and Hakim Ajmal Khan on 31 December 1922.

The Council entry programme was confronted by stiff

55. There are differences of opinion about which movement had started first.

56. In early September 1918 Calcutta witnessed a serious riot. The Bakr-Id riot of Bihar of the previous year (September 1917) which was started by Hindus of Shahabad District had a repercussion on Calcutta Muslims. In August 1918, the Punjabi editor of *Naqqash*, an Urdu daily of Calcutta, took exception to a passage in *Indian Daily News* which led to high excitement. There was talk of holy war against the infidels. The non-Bengali Muslims and the Marwaris in Calcutta were involved in it. Government of Bengal, Home (Confidential) File 5M-19, Proceedings nos. 50-51, November 1919.

opposition in Bengal as well as in other parts of the country. Indeed, Das faced greater difficulties in Bengal than outside. Here it involved adjustment not merely with a hostile group in the Congress but also with a powerful section of Muslim public opinion. As pointed out earlier, the section led by Nawab Ali Chowdhury was concerned with ensuring a proper constitutional position for Muslims in Bengal, which meant effective Muslim weightage in the sphere of ministerial responsibility and acceptance of the fact of Muslim majority in the administration. The other group who had joined the Khilafat-non-co-operation movement whole-heartedly were non-co-operators in the true sense of the term and they opposed any talk of participating in elections. Das knew that his programme could not be acceptable to those Muslims who were firmly wedded to non-co-operation. Hence he turned his attention to the other section of Muslim leaders who wanted to use the legislature for protecting Muslim interests. It was not too difficult for him to establish rapport with the latter as he fully realized the significance of two facts in Bengal's life, namely, that Muslims were in a majority and that due to lack of education they were lagging behind Hindus. He, therefore, made it a part of his political programme to fight for the rights of Muslims. In an editorial in the *Forward* he wrote :

Is it not unjust to shut out the community which commands the largest majority in the province from their legitimate share of the country ? 'Let them wait till they are efficient'—is not a very convincing argument especially as the Hindus and the Muhammadans alike have been kept out of their own by an alien bureaucracy exactly on this plea.<sup>57</sup>

The Hindu-Muslim pact, commonly known as the Bengal Pact, was the result of such thinking. The terms of the pact were finally settled by Das sitting in the house of Sir Abdur Rahim<sup>58</sup> and ratified at the meeting of the Swarajya

57. *Forward*, 6 December 1923. It was the organ of the Swarajya Party and C.R. Das was its editor.

58. Biswas, n. 46, p. 101. See also *Servant of India*, 24 January 1926 which remarked : "It is publicly stated that Sir Abdur Rahim, though then in government service, was with Deshbandhu, the joint author of the Pact."

Party on 16 December 1923. The object of the pact was to give proper recognition to the interests of both communities in Bengal and thereby remove, once for all, all differences and misunderstandings between them. The terms stipulated :

1. Representation in Bengal Legislative Council on the basis of population and through separate electorates.
2. Representation to the local bodies to be in the proportion of 60 and 40 in every district—60 to the community which was in the majority and 40 to the minority.
3. 55 per cent of the Government posts should go to the Mohammedans.
4. No resolution or enactment which affected the religion of any of the communities would be allowed without the consent of 75 per cent of the elected members of that community.<sup>59</sup>

The negotiations leading to the Bengal Pact strengthened the position of Das who won the Council elections held in November 1923 with a thumping majority. "Bengal has declared itself Swarajist", declared the *Statesman*. "In every kind of Bengali constituency the Swarajists have triumphed. Even the Mohamedan electorate", the paper continued, "which was considered to be a safe asset for government, has been rent asunder, and 19 sympathisers with Mr. C.R. Das have been elected as against 20 of a contrary opinion."<sup>60</sup> In the Hindu constituencies the Swarajists captured 36 out of a total of 47 seats, in the landholders' constituencies 3 out of 5; and 4 out of 6 special seats belonging to Anglo-Indians and Indian trade and commerce also went to them.<sup>61</sup> After ratification of

59. D.K. Chatterjee, *C.R. Das and Indian National Movement* (Calcutta, 1965), pp. 131-2. See also Abdul Karim, *Letters on Hindu-Muslim Pact* (Calcutta, 1924), Appendix A.

60. *The Statesman*, 1 December 1923.

61. *Ibid.* The distribution of elected seats under the 1919 Act was as follows :

Muhammadan urban	—	6
Muhammadan rural	—	33
Non-Muhammadan urban	—	11
Non-Muhammadan rural	—	35
Calcutta University	—	1

the Bengal Pact two other Muslim members joined the Swarajya Party thereby raising the total of the Muslim members in it to 21.

Das won another spectacular victory in the Calcutta Corporation election in March 1924. Out of the 75 elected members the electorate returned 55 Swarajists. Das and other Swarajists were elected Aldermen of Calcutta; Das was also elected Mayor on 16 April 1924 by 59 votes to 13 and chose Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, son-in-law of Sir Abdur Rahim, as his Deputy. This victory was unique because not only Calcutta was till then considered too conservative a city to fall into the hands of the Swarajists but also because it strengthened the Swarajists position in the Council. The assumption of power in the city enabled the party to extend some patronage and thereby compensate for the disadvantages of their position in the Council, where they could not accept office because of the nature of their programme.

The programme of the Swarajya Party was to resort to "uniform, continuous, consistent obstruction with a view to making the Government through the Council impossible".<sup>62</sup> This was successfully pursued by the Swarajists. The second Reformed Council began its sitting on 22 January 1924. On Das's refusal to accept ministership, the Governor, Lord Lytton, appointed Fazlul Huq, A.K. Ghuznavi and Surendranath Mallick as Ministers. Obviously Das was disappointed by Fazlul Huq's action and there ensued a period of antagonism between them.

To challenge and bring an end to dyarchy, the Swarajists voted down the Ministers' Salary Bill in March 1924. Without asking the Ministers to resign, Lytton again presented the

Landholders	—	5
Europeans	—	5
European Trade and Commerce	—	11
Indian Trade and Commerce	—	4
Anglo-Indians	—	2
Total elected members	—	113
Nominated and Ex-officio	—	26

62. Election Manifesto of Swarajya Party, *Indian Quarterly Register*, 1924, vol. I, p. 139. The name of the party was changed to Swaraiya Party in the constitution adopted at its conference in 1924.

Bill in the Council in August 1924 which was again rejected. Fazlul Huq and Ghuznavi thereafter resigned and the session was prorogued. In January 1925 Abdur Rahim, then a member of the Governor's Executive Council, moved that provision be made in the budget for Ministers' salary and this was passed in spite of the Swarajists' opposition. Nawab Ali Chowdhury and Manmatha Nath Roy were then appointed Ministers but again the Council refused to pass the Salary Bill in May 1925. The Government, however, certified the budget for the year 1925-26.

In October 1924, the Government came down with a heavy hand on the Swarajist members. On 25 October 1924, Calcutta and the rest of Bengal saw indiscriminate house searches and raids resulting in the arrest of 107 Swarajist leaders all over Bengal, including Subhas Bose, who was then Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation. However, the Legislature refused to sanction the repression. The Bengal Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill introduced by the Government on 7 January 1925, incorporating the powers assumed by the Government through the Ordinance issued in October 1924 under which it had arrested the Swarajist leaders, was rejected by the Council by 57 votes for and 65 against. Three Muslim members outside the Swarajya Party also voted with it on this occasion. This forced the Governor to certify the Ordinance. The defeats suffered over and again by the Government finally forced it to suspend the administration of transferred subjects by the Ministers in Bengal from 13 June 1925 to January 1927, i.e. till the end of the term of this Second Council. This no doubt crowned Das's efforts though he lived for only 3 days more.<sup>63</sup>

The Bengal Pact thus provided Das with a solid base in the Legislature by ensuring the co-operation of the Muslim members. However, the forces which Das challenged did not take it lying down. Although his thumping victory with almost an equal number of Hindus and Muslims supporting him unnerved the bureaucracy, it now made a vigorous effort to sow seeds of doubt in the Muslim mind regarding the Swarajists and thereby to bring about a rift between the

63. He expired on 16 June 1925.

Muslim and Hindu members of the Council. British officials had persuaded Nawab Musharruff Hossain to bring forward a resolution in the very first session of the Council in March 1924, asking for immediate implementation of the terms of the Bengal Pact. "Khan Bahadur Musharruff Hossain received every sort of encouragement from the supporters of Government and also from individual members of Government to press his resolution", pointed out Abdur Rahim, an Executive Councillor, in a confidential note.<sup>64</sup> The feeling in Government circles was that Das would be pushed to the wall. The cue was taken by the Muslim non-Swarajist members and a section of the Muslim press. Das could avoid division on the motion and thereby avert defeat by taking the stand that the terms of the pact could only be implemented after the attainment of Swaraj and that he had not the time to place the pact before the country. The comment of *Muslim Hitaishi* was revealing of the type of propaganda being carried on in a section of the Muslim press. It observed :

Mr. C.R. Das has said that if the terms of the pact be not fulfilled after the attainment of Swaraj, the Mussalmans will be quite entitled to realise their dues on the strength of the 'lathi'. In the meantime the Hindus will become completely skilled in the use of 'lathi', so the Mussalmans will never be able to realise their dues....<sup>65</sup>

This type of writing had the encouragement of the bureaucracy which openly promoted communal feelings. When the Ministers' Salary Bill was refused by the Council in March 1924, Lytton allowed the Ministers to continue without salary hoping that he would get the sanction in the next sitting.<sup>66</sup> During this period officials gave Fazlul Huq and Ghuznavi every encouragement to secure the support of the members. As

64. Minute dated 14 June 1924 of Sir Abdur Rahim. Government of Bengal, Home (Apptt) 4M-12 (1-3) Proceedings A, nos. 70-71, November 1925. Broomfield, n. 48, p. 254.

65. *Muslim Hitaishi*, 4 April 1924. English translation quoted in Broomfield, n. 48, p. 255.

66. Earl of Lytton, *Pandits and Elephants* (London, 1942), p. 51.

Lytton recalled later : "The Ministers worked their power of patronage for all it was worth, and brought what pressure they could upon the members of their own community."<sup>67</sup> When they could not be successful Lytton depended upon Abdur Rahim and Nawab Ali Chowdhury to fight the Swarajists. The latter was made Minister in early 1925, but the Council again refused the Salary Bill in May 1925. The other 'tactical expedient' followed by the officials was to promote unity among the Muslim members in order to build up a separate party against the Swaraj Party. Obviously the basis of this was communal, but as they were placed in a duel with Swarajists the officials felt that they were not expected to fight clean.<sup>68</sup>

Besides the above expedients, i.e. repression on the Swarajist members and attempt at alienation of the Muslim Swarajist members from the party, the government enacted certain measures benefiting Muslims. It sanctioned leave of one and a half hour for Friday prayers to Muslims Government servants. It introduced for the first time a fixed percentage, i.e. one-third, of Government jobs for Muslims.<sup>69</sup> Since advertisement of posts was to be made through recognized Muslim associations this led to the foundation of a large number of associations and their close contact with the Government.<sup>70</sup> To what extent District officials involved themselves in all this is clear from the following extract from the report of the District Magistrate, Dacca, to the Divisional Commissioner, Dacca, about two rival organizations, Dacca District Anjuman and Dacca District Moslem Association :

It would certainly be more convenient to have only one such recognized association and the claims of the Moslem

67. Ibid., p. 52.

68. Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, to Government of India, dated 14 June 1924. Government of Bengal, Home (Apptt.) File 6R-92 (3), Proceedings A, nos. 31-40, December 1925. Also see Broomfield, n. 48, p. 253.

69. Secretariat Instruction no. XIV, 1924, available in Government of Bengal, Home (Apptt.) File IL-18, Proceeding B, 278 of the year 1929.

70. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 8A-2, Proceedings B, nos. 653-64, September 1924.



Association to continuance of recognition are weak. The most satisfactory solution would have been the amalgamation of the two associations. Attempts were made to effect this after the last Janmastami processions but they failed.<sup>71</sup>

Abdur Rahim who, as Executive Councillor, was formulating Government's policy towards Muslims, had no hesitation in recommending this course. This comes out clearly from his minute dated 27 July 1925, suggesting the removal of Muslim grievances regarding employment in public service. "The political position remained uncertain and acute and the best prospect of getting support for Government seemed still to lie in the Muhammadan quarters," he wrote, inviting Government's attention to the question of Muhammadan appointments.<sup>72</sup>

By 1925 his position as leader of Bengali Muslims was fully established and won recognition at the all-India plane. While continuing as Executive Councillor in Bengal, he presided over the annual session of the All-India Muslim League in December 1925 at Aligarh and delivered a speech which was markedly anti-Hindu in tone. He supported communal electorate not only for Muslims but also for Europeans and advocated the formation of a Muslim party in the legislature as the most imperative need under the existing political condition.<sup>73</sup>

As mentioned earlier, riots between Hindus and Muslims on the question of music before mosque during Hindu processions became a regular feature in Bengal. Ghuznavi who resigned as Minister in August 1924, because the Council refused to sanction his salary, organised a movement for preventing music before mosques. In early April 1926 Calcutta witnessed a serious riot on the question of an Arya Samajist

71. Letter from H.C.V. Philpol, District Magistrate, Dacca, no. 2819, dated Dacca, 11 May 1927, to the Commissioner, Dacca Division, Government of Bengal, Home Political File 8A-5, Proceedings B, nos. 451-461, September 1927.

72. Government of Bengal, Home (Apptt) 4M-12 (1-3), Proceedings A, nos. 70-71, November 1925. See also Broomfield, n. 48, pp. 270-1.

73. *Indian Quarterly Register*, 1925, vol. II, July-December, p. 355.

procession passing by a mosque with music and band. In severity and duration it surpassed the Calcutta riot of 1918. It was particularly acute in Burrabazar, a business area which had concentration of wealthy upcountry Hindus. Places of worship, i.e. mosques and temples, were heavily desecrated. This became a predominant feature of Hindu-Muslim riots in subsequent years.

While the extreme Hindu and Muslim press unequivocally blamed the opposite side for such events, Mrs. Annie Basant's *New Age* condemned the inflammatory communal propaganda being carried on by Abdur Rahim and his followers. It observed :

Sir Abdur Rahim and his Muslim co-adjustors cannot entirely escape responsibility for the untoward happenings in Calcutta as their inflammatory communal propaganda must have contributed to the production of an atmosphere favourable for such outbursts.<sup>74</sup>

This vindicated the comment of *Forward* which had asked "How long" and "What next" would they need "to ensure the safe return" of Abdur Rahim's 30 followers at the ensuing November (1926) election.<sup>75</sup>

The leadership in Muslim politics from now onward remained in the hands of those who had developed an uncompromising attitude about Muslim interests and were prepared to go to any length for this regardless of what impact it had on their relations with Hindus. Thus while Nawab Ali Chowdhury, who had laboured hard at the time of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reform proposals to protect Bengali Muslim rights and interests, had categorically condemned the 1918 riots.<sup>76</sup> Abdur Rahim, whose direct or indirect involvement with the riots of 1926 was widely talked about among Hindus<sup>77</sup>, neither condemned it nor tried to explain it. Just after the riots (in May 1926) he formed the Bengal Muslim

74. Quoted in *Modern Review*, vol. XXXIX, no. 5, May 1926, p. 612.

75. *Forward*, 29 April 1926.

76. Broomfield, n. 48, p. 125.

77. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10 and 18 April 1926.

Party, keeping the coming election in mind. The manifesto of the party aimed among others "to secure such a distribution of political power among the general population that domination by a class of monopolists and intelligentsia become ultimately impossible." The manifesto further elaborated :

We (representatives of the Muslim community) have been led to form this party not in any spirit of narrow communalism or religious exclusiveness, but because, as inheritors of a great democratic social system, with our outlook unembarrassed by the limitation of caste and . . . untouchability we feel . . . to contribute our best to the realisation of the true ideal of government of the people, by the people, for the people.<sup>78</sup>

The new Council, i.e. the third Reformed Council, started in January 1927 after the elections held in November 1926 and continued till April 1929 when the Government prorogued it because no Ministry was found stable. On the very first day of business on 17 January the Swarajist motion refusing Ministers' salary was lost by 94 votes to 38 votes. However, Abdur Rahim, who came to the Legislature with a large number of followers, could not be made a minister as no Hindu member of the Legislature even among the Government supporters agreed to serve with him as a Minister.<sup>79</sup> Thereupon the Governor selected Ghuznavi and Byomkesh Chakravorty as Ministers. On 12 March 1927 when the Swarajists again challenged the fresh demand for Ministers' salary they secured 59 votes while 73 votes went against them. The swelling in number of votes in favour of the Swarajist motion from 38 to 59 was due to the fact that Abdur Rahim and his followers among the Muslim members accorded support to it and voted against the Government. In October the Swarajists under the leadership of Sarat Chandra Bose and Bidhan Chandra Roy could retrieve their position and with the help of Abdur Rahim

78. *Modern Review*, May 1926, vol. XXXIX, no. 5, p. 601.

79. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 21 January 1927; *Dainik Basumati*, 23 January 1927.

and his Bengal Muslim Party inflicted a defeat on the Government. On 25 October 1927 they successfully carried a 'no confidence' motion against the Ministers.<sup>80</sup> In supporting the motion Abdur Rahim said that they had no confidence in Ghuznavi and therefore they voted for the no-confidence motion.

The fact is that Abdur Rahim had not got his reward for the support he had accorded to the Government during the Second Council (1923-26). The Governor could not appoint him a minister as no Hindu was prepared to work with him. He perforce turned his attention to building up his position among Muslims not as one backed by Government patronage but as their accredited leader. This explains his 'volte-face' in the legislature on the 'no-confidence' motion against the ministers and public support to the movement against them. Presiding over the Bengal Provincial Muslim Conference in May 1927, he warned that non-fulfilment of the legitimate demands of Muslims would turn them against the Government.<sup>81</sup> As it was, in his statement on 18 September 1926, explaining the aims of the Bengal Muslim Party he had already remarked : "... if the representatives of the Mussalmans of Bengal are resolved no longer to be the dependents of any Hindu organisation, they are equally resolved not to be at the beck and call of the Government."<sup>82</sup> Abdur Rahim now made it his main concern to protect the constitutional position of the Muslim majority in Bengal in any future set-up decided upon by all-India leaders.

## VI

This problem had just come to the fore following the appointment of the Simon Commission to report on the next

80. The motion against Chakravorty was carried by 68 to 57 votes and the one against Ghuznavi by 68 to 62 votes. However, in the December session of the Council which lasted for only two days the Governor appointed Probash Chandra Mittra and Nawab Musharruff Hossain as Ministers. *Indian Quarterly Register*, 1927, vol. II, July-December 1927, p. 261.

81. Abdur Rahim's speech at Barisal on 8 May 1927. *The Statesman*, 9 May 1927.

82. *Indian Quarterly Register*, 1926, vol. II, July-December, p. 98.

instalment of constitutional reforms. On 3 August 1928, the Bengal Council elected Fazlul Huq, Abdur Rahim, Abdul Karim, K.G.M. Farooki, Maharaja of Nashipur, Maharaja of Mymensingh and W.L. Travers to the seven-member committee to assist the Commission. While supporting separate electorates, Fazlul Huq said that introduction of joint electorates with adult franchise would not be of help to Muslims. Muslim women, being more backward than Hindu women and observing stricter purdah than the latter, would be more reluctant to go to polling booths and as voters were practically equally divided between males and females in Bengal, Muslims would lose considerably.<sup>83</sup> Suhrawardy in his evidence before the Commission on the other hand maintained that "... joint electorates cannot compose religious differences. Moslems are not prepared to give up their religion for the sake of nationalism.<sup>84</sup>" The Commission, while recommending separate electorates for Muslims, remarked:

We are of opinion that under existing conditions in Bengal separate communal electorates must be retained for election to the legislature, and should be extended to all local self-governing bodies as well where adequate representation should be provided for all communities.<sup>85</sup>

Meanwhile, Muslim leaders in Bengal were also involved with consideration of the Nehru Report. The Bengal leaders met for a preliminary talk in the office of *Mussalman* in December 1928. Among the Hindu leaders present were J.M. Sengupta, Sarat Chandra Bose, Bidhan Chandra Roy, J.C. Gupta and Nalini Ranjan Sarkar. The Muslim leaders included Abdur Rahim, Fazlul Huq, Abdul Karim, Mujibur Rahman, Akram Khan and Maulana Islambadi. The discussion over the demand of Muslims about their share in government jobs ran into difficulty and the meeting broke up on this point only. During the discussion, Abdur Rahim made a comment

83. *Ibid.*, 1929, vol II, July-December, p. 61.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

85. *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission* (Calcutta, 1930), vol. III, p. 171.

about the position of the Muslim leaders saying, "Look here, Dr. Roy, you forget that you Hindus have got only one enemy—the Britishers—to fight, whereas we Muslims have got to fight three enemies: Britishers on the front, Hindus on the right and Mollas on the left".<sup>86</sup>

This, no doubt, showed the dominant feeling among Muslims. The experience which the Muslim leaders gathered inside the legislature over the Bengal Tenancy Act 1928 further contributed to this feeling.<sup>87</sup> The Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill while extending ownership rights to cultivators of some 'years' standing retained the landlord's right to pre-emption fees and transfer fees known as *salami*, though the latter was reduced from 25 to 20 per cent. This was vehemently objected to by the Muslim members who wanted their total abolition.<sup>88</sup> In the division on the question of *Salami* all the Hindu members, including the Swarajists, voted in favour of the clause and the Muslim members, irrespective of the fact that there were a number of zamindars among them, voted against it. Only four Muslim members, two of them in the Government, voted in favour of retention. This development not only resulted in compartmentalization in the legislature between Hindu and Muslim members but also served as an impetus to the formation of a tenants' party in 1929, as will be discussed later.

The Nehru Report and the All-Party Convention evoked mixed reactions. Abdur Rahim took a lead over others by calling the Bengal Muslim All Parties Conference on 23 December 1928 in Calcutta to define the attitude of Bengali Muslims to the Nehru Report. Welcoming the delegates, Shaheed Suhrawardy, chairman of the Reception Committee, emphasized the need for united front among Muslims and expressed the hope that the Conference would be a permanent

86. Quoted in Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar* (Dacca, 1970), edn. 2, p. 61.

87. The Bill was introduced in the Council on 7 August 1928 and after prolonged discussion was passed on 4 September 1928. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XXV, no. 1, p. 380 and no. II, p. 1023. For the Bill see *Calcutta Gazette*, 12 July 1928.

88. Azizul Haque, Abdur Rahim, 4 September 1928. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XXX, no. 2, pp. 1004-6.

body which would sit from time to time. In his presidential address, Abdur Rahim said:

The Mahommedans of Bengal have a special grievance with regard to the number of seats now allotted to them. They form about 50 p.c. of the population and the Southborough Committee in spite of the protests of the Government of India gave them 40 p.c. of the elected seats, proceeding on the basis of the Lucknow Pact in which, as the Mahommedans all over India now admit, the Mussalmans of Bengal had received very unfair treatment. We insist that this injustice be remembered and that either 55 per cent of the seats be reserved for them through separate electorates or that at least Mahommedan constituencies be formed in that proportion.<sup>89</sup>

A few of the important demands adopted by the conference were: (1) That the future constitution of India should be on the basis of responsible government with dominion status under the British Crown and should be in the form of a fully autonomous state; (2) that representation in legislatures should continue to be by means of separate electorates as at present; and (3) that any territorial redistribution that might at any time be necessary should not in any way affect the Moslem majority in the Punjab, Bengal, North-Western Provinces, Sind and Baluchistan.<sup>90</sup> A few days later, when sessions of the All India Muslim League and the All India Khilafat Conference were simultaneously being held in Calcutta during 28-30 December 1928, followers of Abdur Rahim and Suhrawardy tried to create trouble there. While the Bengal and Punjab Khilafat Committees had expressed their opinion in favour of the Nehru Report, the Central Khilafat Committee under the Ali brothers came out strongly against it.<sup>91</sup> They were supported by Abdur Rahim and Suhrawardy.

89. *The Statesman*, 24 December 1928.

90. *Ibid.*

91. See the account of All India Khilafat Conference, and that of Bengal Khilafat Committee meetings in *Indian Quarterly Register*, vol. II, July-December 1928, pp. 402-8.

The efforts of Abdur Rahim were mainly directed towards denying the All India Muslim League the representative character it claimed and ensuring that Bengal Muslims' interests were not ignored in any talk on a future constitutional set-up. However, this discussion made one thing very clear. The school of thought Abdur Rahim represented was not prepared to compromise on the question of the constitutional position of the Muslim majority in Bengal, either for the sake of Hindu-Muslim unity, or for the sake of Muslim interests outside Bengal. The deliberations, at All Parties Convention in Calcutta, the All Parties Muslim Conference at Delhi and the special session of the League at Delhi in March 1929 confirmed the success of this group. That in the Punjab and Bengal, in the event of adult suffrage not being established, the voting ratio of Muslims should be in accordance with their population in the provinces became the accepted creed of Indian Muslims.<sup>92</sup> It found place in Jinnah's fourteen points, the particular demand being formulated as follows :

All Legislatures in the country and other elected bodies shall be constituted on the definite principle of adequate and effective representation of minorities in every Province without reducing the majority in any Province to a minority or even to equality.<sup>93</sup>

Bengal Muslims were prepared to give up separate electorates only if provision was made for adult suffrage or reservation of seats according to their population.

## VII

Inside Bengal, Abdur Rahim's efforts now were directed towards uniting Muslim representatives who were expected to oppose all moves of the Government that went against Muslim interests in the province. He sought to effect unity

92. Resolution passed at the Subjects Committee of Special Session of League at Delhi, March 1929. *The Proceedings of All Parties National Convention* (Allahabad, n.d.), p. 17.

93. *Indian Quarterly Register*, 1929, vol. I, January-June, p. 365.



not on the basis of co-operation with the Government but on the basis of promoting the community's interests. Already a section of Bengal Muslims carried a resolution at the session of the All India Muslim League at Calcutta in December 1928 condemning the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill. The resolution introduced by Azizul Huq, *inter alia*, said:

All India Moslem League is emphatically of opinion that the provisions relating to the grant of further rights to the landlords of Bengal in the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill by the introduction of pre-emption and Salami are extremely detrimental to the rural population in the Presidency of Bengal and the League . . . appeals to His Excellency the Governor of Bengal for withholding his assent to the Bill till these two provisions are reconsidered by the Council.<sup>94</sup>

This concern for peasants and cultivators, 80 per cent of whom were Muslims, from now onward became a dominant trend in Muslim politics in Bengal.

After their experience at the session, of the All India Muslim League and the All India Khilafat Conference in December 1928 and at the special League session in March 1929 at Delhi, which ended in a pandemonium, the Bengal leaders attempted to organize a purely provincial party which would look after the interests of Bengal Muslims. On 22 April 1929 the Governor dissolved the legislature as no ministry was found stable. A fresh election was held in June 1929. On the eve of the new session (which started on 2 July 1929) the 27 Muslim members of the existing Muslim parties in the Council held a conference in Calcutta and decided to form the Bengal Muslim Council Association to advance the cause of the community in the legislature. Simultaneously, the Tenants Party was formed at the suggestion of Fazlul Huq. Any member of the former association could join it.<sup>95</sup> In the Council, the

94. *Mussalman*, 1 January 1929. See also Pirzada, n. 33, vol. II, p. 151.

95. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 3 September 1929; see also Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937* (Dacca, 1972), p. 76.

Tenants Party under the leadership of Fazlul Huq sat separately away from the Muslim members who cooperated with the Government. This became the nucleus of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity.

The Nikhil Banga Praja Samity was formed in 1929. Abdur Rahim became its President and Akram Khan its Secretary. Mujibur Rahman, Abdul Karim, Fazlul Huq, Abdulla Suhrawardy and Abdul Momen were elected Vice-Presidents and Shamsuddin Ahmad and Tamizuddin Khan were elected Joint Secretaries. This identification of Muslim leaders with the interests of peasants and cultivators brought polarisation in Bengal politics not only between Hindus and Muslims but also between zamindars and peasants. In Bengal, due to the existing economic conditions a clear-cut division existed in society between Hindu zamindars and Muslim peasants and the holding of 'Praja Sammelans' which aimed at consolidating the Prajas with a view to protecting their rights and interests against the zamindars' encroachment helped the growth of this polarisation. From the thirties onwards Muslim leaders and elite championed their cause and this developed in course of time into a Praja Andolan under Muslim leadership.

In the Legislature, with the withdrawal of the Swarajya Party in early 1930, the Government no more needed the support of the Muslim members for every bit of legislative work. At the same time it was not sure whether its interests would be saved by politicising the peasantry. The Government therefore could easily discard Abdur Rahim and Fazlul Huq who were never again made ministers or councillors. It now patronised men like Khwaja Nazimuddin, K.G.M. Farooki and A.K. Ghuznavi, (all Nawabs) who were not likely to go astray (from the Government's point of view) with the currents of political movement. This appeared more imperative in the face of the civil disobedience movement started by the Congress in 1930 and resurrection of terrorist activities leading to the famous Chittagong Armoury Raid in 1930. Since December 1929 when the official announcement proclaimed the revival of dyarchy for the fifth time in Bengal, Khwaja Nazimuddin (later on elevated to Knighthood) continued as either Minister or as Executive Councillor till 1937

when Provincial Autonomy came into operation. Fazlul Huq was also selected, along with A.K. Ghuznavi, as a representative to the Round Table Conferences where they strongly supported separate electorates for Muslims.

The Communal Award (August 1932) by Ramsay MacDonald and the diametrically opposed attitudes of Hindus and Muslims towards it put a seal on polarisation in Bengal politics on communal lines which had been growing all these years. The award increased Muslim representation from 39 seats in an Assembly of 139 members under the 1919 Act to 120 seats (including two seats for Muslim women and 1 for Dacca University) in an Assembly of 250 members under the 1935 Act. One hundred eleven new seats created under new franchise had been divided among Muslims, Scheduled Castes and Europeans (their representation increased from 16 seats in the earlier legislature to 25 seats under the new Act).<sup>96</sup> The position as it finally stood as a result of the Communal Award was as follows : Of the 250 seats in the Bengal Legislature 78, of which 30 were reserved for Scheduled Castes, were general with total Hindu population, including Scheduled Castes, 21,570,407 (Scheduled Castes being 9,124,925); 117 Muslim, with total population 27,497,624; 3 Anglo-Indian with total population 27,573; 11 European with total population 20,895 ; and 2 Indian Christian with total population 1,29,134. Besides, 39 seats were given to representatives of special interests : 5 women (2 General, 2 Muslim, 1 Anglo-Indian), 2 University (Calcutta and Dacca), 5 landholders, 8 Labour and 19 Commerce and Industry (14 European, 4 General and 1 Muslim Commerce).

Caste Hindus felt indignant because there had been a heavy slicing of the percentage of representation which they had enjoyed as an advanced and educated community since 1909. Muslims remained dissatisfied because they got fewer seats than warranted by their population. Remarked the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* :

One must frankly confess, it has not fallen to our lot

96. See the table opposite showing the distribution of Legislative seats under 1935 Act.

TABLE I  
Composition of Bengal Assembly under Government of India Act, 1935

Total Seats										
250										
Special Seats representing different interests					General (not reserved for Hindus)			Reserved for different communities		
39					48			163		
Land- Lords	Labour	Univer- sities	Women	Com- merce	Muslims	Sch. Caste	Euro- pean	In. Chr.	A.I.	
5	8	2	5	19		30	11	2	3	
Hindus				Muslim A.I.				Urban Rural		
2				2 1				6 111		
European				Hindu Muslim				Urban Rural		
14				4 1				12 36		
In. Chr. = Indian Christian				A.I. = Anglo-Indian						

for a long time to come across such a preposterous document as reached our hand last evening . . . in Bengal out of 250 members of the legislature only 80 were allotted for Hindus.<sup>97</sup>

"The Hindus have been singled out for reduction in their representation even below their normal population strength by weightage being cast against them", said Rabindranath Tagore presiding over a protest meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall.<sup>98</sup>

Hindus one and all rejected the Communal Award though a section of Congressmen in Bengal acquiesced in the "no acceptance and no rejection" resolution of the Working Committee, later approved by the Bombay Session of the Congress in 1934. According to the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, "An overwhelming majority of nationalists in the country looked upon that resolution as a great blunder on the part of the Congress leaders" and wanted them to revise it and thus "rectify a mistake which bids fair to produce a most deplorable consequence".<sup>99</sup> Hindus in Bengal started an anti-Communal Award agitation which brought a split in the Bengal Congress. Jinnah, on the other hand, declared: "Provided the Congress did not carry on any intensive agitation against the Communal Award, Muslims will be willing to and ready to join them in their attack on the White Paper."<sup>100</sup> This undoubtedly represented the feelings of Bengal Muslims also.

Already the crystallization of purely Muslim politics, separate from Hindu politics or Congress politics, had resulted in a definite advantage for Muslims in Bengal. During the period 1927-33 a large number of Muslims were elected to the Local and Union Boards in the different districts of Bengal. This further strengthened the spirit of 'self-asser-

97. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, editorial, 17 August 1932. In a number of subsequent editorials like "Anglo-Moslem treaty", "Iconoclasts at work", "The White Conspiracy", "The Benthall Circulars", the paper criticised the British attitude towards Bengali Hindus. See also Biswas, n. 46, pp. 67-71.

98. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 23 September 1932. A similar view was expressed by Ramananda Chatterjee, editor, *Modern Review*.

99. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 23 October 1934.

100. *Ibid.*, 21 June 1934.

tion' among them. Their political identification as a separate entity was also helped by a large number of agricultural and educational legislations which eminently benefited agriculturists who were largely Muslims. In the legislature, no doubt, the Muslim leadership represented by landed aristocracy continued to depend on Government patronage, but the Tenants Party under Fazlul Huq and Abdur Rahim extended qualified support to Government's legislation benefiting the Muslim community. The Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act 1928, Bengal Rural Primary Education Bill (1930), the Bengal Municipal Act Amendment Bill (1932), the Bengal Moneylenders' Bill (1932), and the Bengal Agricultural Debtors' Bill (1933)<sup>101</sup> were carried through in the face of vehement opposition from the Hindu members inside the legislature and the Hindu press outside.

These developments considerably shaped the political attitudes of Muslims and Hindus, the former steadily realizing the immense benefit of their coming to power and utilizing the administration for the advancement of their community. Hindu resentment at and opposition to some of the measures beneficial to Muslims appeared to the latter as motivated by vested interests. Hindus, on the other hand, felt that the Government was enriching Muslims at their expense. The Communal Award put a seal on these two distinct attitudes. It represented an utter failure on the part of Hindu leadership which could not convince Muslims that their protests were not against Muslims getting their due share in Bengal but against the excessive weightage given to Europeans at the cost of Hindu representatives.

Both the Congress and the League criticised the Government of India Act 1935 though on different grounds. The Congress rejected the Act 'in its entirety',<sup>102</sup> but resolved to contest the elections as it did not like to leave the entire field

101. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XXXIII, pp. 109-38; vol. XXXV, pp. 346-82 and vol. XLIV, no. 1, pp. 103-24. The Bills were enacted by the year 1936.

102. Resolution of the Indian National Congress, 12-14 April 1936, in Maurice Gwyer and A. Appadorai, *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution 1921-47* (London, 1957), vol. I, p. 385.

for its opponents. The League, on the other hand, condemned the federal scheme but was prepared to try the provincial part "for what it was worth".<sup>103</sup>

Thus, the evolution of Muslim politics in Bengal from 1905, when the partition of Bengal first aroused political consciousness among them, particularly relating to their position as the majority community, to the Act of 1935, which gave a constitutional guarantee to that position, was marked by attempts at self-assertion of the community. Towards the close of this period a positive attitude towards the political developments in terms of coming to power and utilizing the same for the advancement of the community crystallised. The growing political awareness of Muslims and polarisation between Hindu politics and Muslim politics achieved during these decades signified two things. It meant, firstly, that Muslims were seeking to assert their rightful place in the society, economic life and politics of Bengal and, secondly, that they were no more prepared to depend entirely on Government patronage, but were determined to organise their own strength and make a bid for capturing power under the Act of 1935. This was the situation on the eve of the elections of 1937, which marked the beginning of a new chapter in the evolution of Muslim politics in Bengal, in line with a similar development in the rest of the country.

103. Resolution of the All-India Muslim League, 11-12 April 1936, *ibid.*, p. 285.

### CHAPTER III

## ELECTIONS OF 1937 AND AFTER

As seen earlier, the evolution of Muslim politics during the years following the Swarajya Party's withdrawal from the Legislature in 1930 was marked, on the one hand, by efforts of Muslim leadership in the Legislature to advance the community's interests by beneficial legislations, and, on the other, by Praja Andolan under the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity which was consolidating Muslims on an economic platform. The spread of English education among Muslims, particularly in East Bengal after the establishment of Dacca University in 1921, brought into being a new class of rural leadership, young and educated but not based on traditional landholding. This class represented the urge for modernization and also provided leadership to Praja Andolan which in effect was a new development in Bengal Muslim politics. Thus, progress in education along with the growth of local self-governing institutions and enlargement of the electorate, enfranchising 4 new Muslim voters to every 3 Hindus,<sup>1</sup> brought into politics new forces and possibilities before the provincial elections of 1937.

Political polarisation, in terms of complete division between Hindus and Muslims, was quite apparent by now. This was once more demonstrated in late December 1935 over an issue of earmarking 25 per cent of the Calcutta Corporation jobs for Muslims. All the 15 Muslim Councillors, including the Mayor, Fazlul Huq, resigned from the Corporation when the Hindu members refused to agree to this proposal and most of the Muslims boycotted the subsequent elections. This development, in spite of the fact that in April 1935 it was only Congress support which had enabled Fazlul Huq to occupy the Mayoral chair, in a way symbolised the alienation of politically conscious Muslims from the Congress.

1. Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937* (Dacca, 1972), p. 33.



Yet among themselves they were still far from being united. During 1935-37 they were divided into three main groups. The Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti was in many ways the most important among them. By holding regular All Bengal Praja Sammelan every year since its birth in 1929, it had attracted support of the peasantry, effectively articulated the political aspirations of the Muslim middle class and in the process succeeded in developing organized units at the district level. The annual Sammelan at Mymensingh in 1935 was such a success that it boosted the prestige of the Samity among Muslims all over Bengal to a new high. In the same year, Fazlul Huq was elected President of this body.

The annual conference of the Samity held in Dacca<sup>2</sup> in April 1936 was the first important step towards crystallization of political parties. The younger and radical elements in it, who mostly represented Eastern Bengal, had already asserted themselves in the previous year at the time of the election of the President for they had got Fazlul Huq elected defeating the elder group of leaders representing Calcutta. That was a challenge to the city based leadership of the Samity led by Akram Khan and Abdur Rahim. To cover all sections of the peasantry within its fold the party was renamed Krishak Praja Party. Presently it took the shape of a political party and established a lead over others. Akram Khan and Momen, on the other hand, tried to continue for some time the original Nikhil Banga Krishak Samity, which was joined by Shaheed Suhrawardy and others in May 1936. It was, however, clear that the bulk of the peasantry had come under the leadership of Fazlul Huq.

The landed aristocrats got scared at this consolidation of Muslim peasantry under radical leadership. They felt helpless in the face of the new extended suffrage, for their future from now on depended on the votes of the peasantry whose interests were diametrically opposite to theirs. At the initiative of Nawab Habibulla Bahadur of Dacca they formed themselves into the United Muslim Party in May 1936. Habibulla was

2. A.M. Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar* (Dacca, 1970) edn. 2, p. 111.

elected President and Nawab Musharruf Hossain of Jalpaiguri as Vice-President. This made members of Akram Khan's Praja Samity vacillate. Most of them ultimately joined the new party.

The leaders of the United Muslim Party, however, realized that their prospects in the coming elections would remain gloomy unless they forged a united front with the Krishak Praja Party. It soon made a move in this direction and organised a meeting of leaders of the two parties at the residence of Habi-bulla in Calcutta. The unity talks, however, broke down on the question of leadership. This question assumed great importance as it was clear that anyone who was selected would get the chief ministership. The Krishak Praja Party wanted to select Fazlul Huq who was not acceptable to the aristocrats. The breakdown of the unity talks generated a series of allegations and counter-allegations. Fazlul Huq described the United Muslim Party as a Zamindar party opposed to abolition of the Permanent Settlement,<sup>3</sup> whereas Khwaja Nazimuddin of the United Muslim Party charged that Fazlul Huq's party was "not a purely Muslim organisation" and it "never sought or welcomed the co-operation of prominent Muslims of Bengal who really represent and voice the interests and feelings of the Muslim community".<sup>4</sup>

When these groups were trying to consolidate themselves, a third group, i.e., the business community of Calcutta, went to Lahore in response to a call by Jinnah to attend a meeting of the All India Muslim League Parliamentary Board. At this time Jinnah who was working for unity of Indian Muslims under one political party was trying to make a dent on provincial Muslim politics. Of the 40 members who were invited from Bengal only M.A.H. Ispahani, Abdur Rahman Siddique and Nooruddin responded to the call and the first two went to Lahore.<sup>5</sup> There they were entrusted "with the responsibility of launching the new Muslim League party in Bengal". In Ispahani's own words, "He (Jinnah) told us that as I was the younger of

3. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 16 June 1936.

4. *Ibid.*

5. M.A.H. Ispahani, *Qaid-e-Azam, as I knew him* (Karachi, 1967), edn. 2, pp. 14-16.

the two, the main responsibility of running around and getting things done lay on my shoulder ... and assured us that he would be available for advice and assistance and that he would go to any place to which he was summoned".<sup>6</sup>

The natural outcome of this meeting was that Jinnah was invited to Bengal in August 1936 to settle the dispute between the United Muslim Party and the Krishak Praja Party. It is note worthy in this context that a section of the Krishak Praja Party and others also welcomed this development. To them Jinnah was a democratic leader and to fight the moneyed aristocratic Muslim leaders in Bengal they thought they needed his strong support. The aristocrats, on the other hand, counted on the influence which Ispahani had over Jinnah.

A representative group of the Krishak Praja Party started talks with Jinnah at the residence of Ispahani where Jinnah was putting up since his arrival in Calcutta on 18 August 1936. But the talks took an unsuccessful turn because the younger members of the party insisted on two points which were vital to them but which Jinnah could not accept. These were: acceptance of abolition of zamindari without any compensation and the right of the Krishak Praja Party to maintain its separate identity and contest general seats. Jinnah's explanation for not accepting these demands was that this would alienate the zamindar members of the United Muslim Party and as he was out to unite all shades of Muslim political opinion under the banner of the All India Muslim League Parliamentary Board he could not concede these proposals. The talks continued for several days and at one stage it seemed probable that the Krishak Praja Party was agreeable to joining the Muslim League Parliamentary Board on the basis of equal representation with the United Muslim Party.<sup>7</sup> By this time the simultaneous talks which Jinnah was conducting with the United Muslim Party resulted in voluntary liquidation of this party. All its members joined the Muslim League Parliamentary Board accepting the condition laid down by Jinnah that he would

6. Ibid., p. 20.

7. *Star of India* (Calcutta), 25 August 1936. Also *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), 26 August 1936.

nominate representatives of the United Muslim Party on the League's Parliamentary Board. A look at the list of the provisional members of the Board would show that apart from leaders of the United Muslim Party, almost all of whom were big landlords, all the nominees of Jinnah were from the non-Bengali business sections of Calcutta.<sup>8</sup>

This combination in the Muslim League Parliamentary Board could have hardly suited the Krishak Praja Party or its leader, Fazlul Huq. On the other hand, these leaders from the business and big landholding houses also felt that bringing the Krishak Praja Party on the Board would hamper its smooth functioning. They, however, accepted Jinnah's advice. Jinnah's efforts to include his personal nominees in the Board and his anxiety to personally nominate members of the United Muslim Party appeared to the Krishak Praja Party as attempts to make the latter a minority in the Board and to establish Jinnah's leadership in Bengal Muslim politics. It appeared to them as a challenge to Fazlul Huq's leadership in Bengal which they were hardly prepared to accept, unlike the other two partners in the Board. However, without making any commitment regarding dissolution of the party, the Krishak Praja Party joined the Muslim League Parliamentary Board.<sup>9</sup>

The unity which was so assiduously worked out by Jinnah did not survive the very first meeting of the Board held on 8 September 1936. A few days before this Fazlul Huq issued a press statement condemning the manner in which this meeting had been convened without consulting him or other important Krishak Praja Party members. He described the arbitrary decision to call the meeting as "a fresh and deliberate attempt to insult the Krishak Praja Party and to make them feel that as Krishak and Prajas they must submit here as elsewhere to what the nawabs and zamindars may choose to decide on their

8. Ispahani, n. 5, p. 27. These were : Mirza Ahmad Ispahani, M.A.H. Ispahani (two brothers), K. Nooruddin, A. R. Siddiqui, Aziz Ansari, Abdulla Gangee, S. Kander Dehlavi. The more prominent of the nominated members from United Muslim Party were : Habibulla, Khwaja Nazimuddin, his brother Shahabuddin (all three from Dacca Nawab family), H.S. Suhrawardy, Akram Khan, Abdullah-al-Baki, A.F. Rahman, Tamizuddin Khan.

9. Momen, n. 1, p. 50

behalf.”<sup>10</sup> When the meeting actually took place the Krishak Praja Party members walked out because of differences with other members on contents of the election manifesto. They insisted on inclusion of the Krishak Praja Party programme, particularly abolition of zamindari, in the manifesto, to which other members in the Board were not agreeable. There was thus a parting of ways making these two groups rivals in the elections.<sup>11</sup>

While explaining the reason for this withdrawal from the League Parliamentary Board to students of Dacca University, Fazlul Huq accused the Muslim non-Bengali business community of Calcutta of not allowing Muslims in Bengal to unite and declared that he would not allow that community “to control the destiny” of Muslims in Bengal. He pointed out that all the nominees of Jinnah to the Board were from that section and all nominees from the United Muslim Party from vested interests, none of them having any claim to represent the Muslim community. Three of them were from the family of the Dacca Nawab and three others from Calcutta.<sup>12</sup>

Thus crystallization of Muslim political parties in Bengal was complete. There were, no doubt, in the election battle a large number of individuals who neither joined the Muslim League Parliamentary Board nor did they associate themselves with the Krishak Praja Party. They kept their options open, mainly depending on their personal popularity in the constituencies. But the major Muslim parties of consequence were the Krishak Praja Party and the Muslim League.

## II

In the changed circumstances, the Krishak Praja Party projected itself as an entirely Muslim organization. Fazlul Huq, who as its President challenged the Muslim League in Bengal in the ‘battle of vote’, also formed a Krishak Praja

10. *Star of India*, 1 September 1936.

11. *Ibid.*, 9 September 1936.

12. Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Social History of Bengal* (Dacca, 1970), edn. 3, pp. 33-34.

Parliamentary Board with Shamsuddin Ahmed and later Rajab Ali Tarafdar of Bogra as secretary. The League Parliamentary Board, on the other hand, selected Nawab Bahadur of Dacca as President and H.S. Suhrawardy as Secretary. The developments in Bengal led Jinnah to issue a statement wherein he referred to Fazlul Huq and his group as "a rift in the lute"<sup>13</sup> and to members of the League Parliamentary Board as representatives of all shades of Muslim political opinion.

The election manifestoes issued by the Krishak Praja Party and the Muslim League make an interesting study. The demands<sup>14</sup> formulated by the former bring out the economic content of its manifesto in clear terms. These demands were as follows :

1. In view of the fact that the land revenue system known as the Permanent Settlement and the land laws of Bengal based on it had arrested the economic growth and development of the province, ways and means should be devised to get them replaced by a more equitable system and law suitable to the needs and requirements of the people. In one word, the demand was for the abolition of zamindari without compensation.

2. Land rent should be reduced by fixing a maximum for each class of land and recognising the mutation of name and division of holding without fees.

3. Landlords' right of pre-emption should be annulled.

4. *Nazar-salami* should be abolished and provision made for criminal punishment for all illegal exactions like *abwab*.

5. Cultivators should be freed from the crushing burden of indebtedness by constituting Debt Settlement Boards.

6. There should be compulsory and free primary education.

7. Resuscitation of dead and dying rivers and khals through local manual labour.

8. Hospitals should be established at the rate of one in each thana of every district.

9. Full self-government in Bengal should be established.

13. *Star of India*, 2 November 1936.

14. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 November 1936. See also Ahmed, n. 2, p. 111:

10. Steps should be taken to reduce the cost of administration.

11. Ministers' salary should be fixed at Rs. 1000/- per month.

12. Steps should be taken to repeal all repressive laws and to release all political prisoners.

This programme naturally was unpalatable to the zamindars for it challenged their very existence. How far were these demands actually intended to be implemented or whether they were only meant for vote-catching is difficult to say, particularly in view of the fact that there were a number of small zamindars, taluqdars, jotedars and influential men of villages in the Krishak Praja Party giving some substance to the criticism of the Krishak Sabha<sup>15</sup> that the Krishak Praja Party was a jotedar party.

In contrast, the Muslim League and the Congress—the two political parties of long standing—talked mainly about political aims and constitutional reforms though they had economic programmes too. The main plank in the League manifesto was Muslim solidarity. This, it insisted, was the prerequisite for making provincial autonomy meaningful to Muslims in Bengal. The Krishak Praja Party, on the other hand, insisted that a political front with the zamindars for the sake of Muslim unity would certainly not render provincial autonomy meaningful to the Muslim peasantry. It stressed the basic needs of the poorest in the land without being articulate on specific political rights. While the League undertook the responsibility of protecting the political, religious and cultural rights of Muslims in India,<sup>16</sup> the Krishak Praja Party promised to give food to everyone in Bengal. Its slogan of *dal bhat* (rice and pulse curry) was devised in order to endear it to the common man who, it was thought, understood it better than the talk of "Muslim unity", the slogan of the League, or "Swaraj", the slogan of the Congress.

At this stage the position of the Congress *vis-a-vis* the two

15. Krishak Sabha, though an independent peasant organization, was a supporter of the Congress politically.

16. *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, vol. I, January-June, p. 301.

Muslim parties need analysis. What would be the attitude of the Congress towards Muslim seats and its attitude towards these two Muslim parties which challenged each other in election? As already stated, the Bengal Congress was too divided at that time, and alienation of most of the Muslim leaders after 1935 made it almost a Hindu organization. The hue and cry raised by Hindus in Bengal against the Communal Award which appeared to Muslims as *Jehad* against them and the Muslim allegation that the Congress supported this Hindu stand compromised its position in the eyes of Muslims. Neither did the Congress in Bengal had courage to contest Muslim seats nor could any Muslim risk to fight election on Congress ticket. The situation which emerged was advantageous to the Krishak Praja Party. Though it was not a purely Muslim organization and had a number of Hindus and a larger number of members of Scheduled Castes in it, placed as it was in a peculiar pre-election situation, it gained by claiming to be a Muslim organization. And the decision of the Congress not to contest Muslim seats even symbolically suited it, and conveniently it confined itself to Muslim seats without the least embarrassment to itself.

The importance of a planned campaign for the 1937 election was well understood by the two parties and both concentrated on it. Because of the difference in their strength, they adopted different media and techniques in the campaign. Muslims in Bengal had only one newspaper in English before the election, i.e., *Star of India*. The paper was founded and owned by Nazimuddin, partly financed by Ispahanis and edited by an Englishman, named Atkinson. It was started in 1932, the year of the Communal Award and the founding in Calcutta by young Muslim entrepreneurs of the New Muslim Majlis and the Muslim Chamber of Commerce. The paper's commitment to the interests of big Muslim landlords and businessmen was obvious. The most important Muslim mass media in Bengali were the weekly and monthly *Mohammadi*. Akram Khan owned this group. He had been a prominent Congress leader among Muslims in Bengal in the twenties and later became an important Praja leader. His leadership clash with Fazlul Huq and his clash of ideology with the younger



group of Praja leaders on the eve of the election led him to join the Muslim League in June 1936. This added to the strength of the Muslim League. Akram Khan was then the leading Muslim journalist in Bengal and his journals had the widest circulation among Muslims. Indeed, these were regarded by Muslims as the only journals which gave vent to their grievances. In October 1936 with a grant from the Government, Akram Khan started a daily in Bengali, *Azad*. This became the mouthpiece of the Muslim League in Bengali. Thus both the Muslim dailies in Bengal were for the Muslim League. On the other hand, the Krishak Praja Party did not have any daily or weekly journal nor had it the money or support to start one.

In the matter of election funds also there could be no comparison between the Krishak Praja Party and the Muslim League. When the United Muslim Party was formed in May 1936, six zamindars who were founder-members paid 30,000 rupees each to the election fund.<sup>17</sup> The non-Bengali Muslim business magnates of Calcutta also contributed liberally to it. Besides, both Khwaja Nazimuddin and K.G.M. Farooki, two prominent League leaders, were in the Government—Nazimuddin in the Governor's Executive Council and Farooqui a Minister. Their personal patronage helped the League to augment its resources. Moreover, the Provincial Khilafat Committee was the stronghold of Shaheed Suhrawardy and he had its funds at his disposal.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the Krishak Praja Party had a very limited fund. The small zamindars, taluqdars and the small number of rich people who were in it could hardly afford to contribute to the general election fund after meeting their own individual expenses in the election. The party had to bank on the personal popularity of its leaders, the popularity of the contestants in their constituencies and the workers who volunteered their services free. It had a band of dedicated workers and students with

17. The author's interview with Abul Mansur Ahmad in Dacca on 23 June 1972.

18. *Azad*, 15 January 1937. The interesting thing is that the Calcutta Khilafat Committee exists even today. Molla Jan Mohammad was its president when he was interviewed by the author on 13 June 1969.

an ideology which was to fight the *Nawabi* politics. Since its main fight was with the Muslim League, it expected help from Hindus in Congress strongholds. It was alleged by Muslim League spokesmen openly during 1937 and even later that Hindus, both Congress and non-Congress, wanted Fazlul Huq to win against the League and that Hindus extended their full support to Praja Party candidates in the Muslim constituencies.

### III

It is interesting to study the line followed by the League in its propaganda through the *Star of India* in English and *Azad* in Bengali, particularly in view of the fact that the League won all the seats in the urban areas where these papers had the greatest appeal. Both these papers started with the talk of Muslim unity and argued that since it was clear that the Congress could not serve Muslim interests in Bengal, Muslims themselves should decide their future. Another argument they gave was that since Muslims were in a majority, not only individual leaders but also the community would gain by united effort and that those who did not cooperate with such effort were self-seekers. These were also the main arguments of Jinnah.

Soon rivalry between the Krishak Praja Party and the League became acute and the latter realized that the Krishak Praja Party was gaining popularity. Also a large number of independents remained non-committed. Because of these factors the Muslim League shifted its stand from anti-Congressism to anti-Hindusism and charged the Krishak Praja Party as a Hindu-sponsored party, devised to break Muslim solidarity. The more the League got scared of the Krishak Praja Party, the more it talked about religion and brought in the services of mullahs and maulvis. *Azad*, from its very inception, talked about the teachings of Islam and ideals of the Muslim/League in identical terms.<sup>19</sup>

19. *Azad*, 9 January 1937. In an editorial "Value of Vote", the editor observed: "As a Muslim is the property of Allah, so also his vote is the property of Allah. It is the directive of Islam and Imam that the vote

Muslims were alienated from the Congress, the League papers pointed out, because the Congress had failed to serve Muslim interests in Bengal committed as it was to Hindu vested interests.<sup>20</sup> These papers now emphasized the fact that communalist Hindus were swelling the ranks of the Congress. *Azad* based its anti-Hindu stand on the rejection of both the Hindu-Muslim pact and the Communal Award by Hindus. It drove home to Muslims the point that not only had injustice been done to them during all these years but that Hindus would never allow them in Bengal their legitimate constitutional rights and proper share in administration. It may be recalled that Muslims got only 48 per cent representation under the Communal Award though they accounted for 56 per cent of the population. Even this inadequate representation, both the papers alleged, Hindus were not prepared to accept while they had no objection to the European community getting excessive representation as Hindu interest in Bengal was identical with British interest. Of the two papers, the tone of *Star of India*, with non-Bengali ownership and an Englishman as editor, was more anti-Hindu than that of *Azad*.

As the election campaign entered its zenith, the papers' entire wrath was directed against Fazlul Huq. *Azad* was particularly harsh in condemning him and his group. In one of its editorials it remarked: "From Mymensingh Praja Sammelan in 1935 respectable Fazlul Huq is forgetting that his Krishak Praja Party is proceeding towards *Karbala*. Destruction is inevitable".<sup>21</sup> This paper categorised supporters of Fazlul Huq into 3 groups: (a) Those who, dishonouring the unanimous decision of Muslim society, became Councillors of the Calcutta Corporation; (b) those who were Congress-minded and anti-Communal Award; and (c) those who had violated the religious and social injunctions of Islam. It ended with the warning: "Muslim Bengal be careful, the elimination of Muslims and

is not given against Allah and his followers." Actually in a number of articles *Azad* conveyed the idea that the teaching of Islam was the main inspiration behind the formation of the Muslim League Parliamentary Board.

20. Ibid., editorial, 21 January 1937.

21. Ibid., 16 January 1937.

establishment of Hindu Raj is the conspiracy". *Star of India*, writing in a similar vein, warned Muslims that Fazlul Huq was actually working in league with the Congress and that his victory would be disastrous for Muslim interests.<sup>22</sup>

The Krishak Praja Party's campaign strategy and techniques were different.<sup>23</sup> They depended more on propaganda through public meetings from village to village. Generally they met at the weekly hats and mosques during prayers. The advantages which the party had over the Muslim League were several.<sup>24</sup> Firstly, the illiterate voters easily understood its talk of economic relief. Fazlul Huq was at that time the most popular leader in Bengal and since the Krishak Praja Party was also a Muslim organization, the League's talk of 'Muslim unity' failed to arouse Muslims to the extent it was expected to do. Secondly, the Krishak Praja Party had a large band of dedicated workers, particularly in the districts where the Praja movement was strong. Their sincere work, door-to-door approach, covering mile after mile on foot, talking to the peasants in their own language, all these had greater impact than efforts of the hired workers of the Muslim League who talked in terms of religion and enemies of Islam. Thirdly, the Muslim youth and students supported the Krishak Praja Party as a progressive organisation. For this reason, the Bengal Congress also supported it. Lastly, certain dramatic developments at this time increased the interest of the voters in the Krishak Praja Party.<sup>25</sup> Dr. R. Ahmed challenged Nazimuddin to contest against Fazlul Huq from any constituency. This 'battle royal' took place in the Patuakhali constituency. The then Governor of Bengal canvassed for Nazimuddin which prompted Fazlul Huq to issue a statement challenging both the Government and zamindars. Patuakhali was within the 'zamindari' area of Nazimuddin and was regarded as the safest place for him.

The Krishak Praja Party concentrated its efforts in places where the Praja movement was strong such as Mymensingh

22. *Star of India*, 11 January 1937

23. Ahmad, n. 2, p. 127.

24. Ibid., pp. 124-5.

25. Ibid., p. 125.

Barisal, Noakhali and Chittagong. Its workers never challenged talk of Muslim unity. Rather they emphasized that this unity should be achieved at "the door of peasants and never at the palace of zamindars".<sup>26</sup> They pointed out that to the villagers it was ridiculous to talk about unity between a Muslim Zamindar and a Muslim Praja, between a Muslim money-lender and a Muslim debtor. They further argued that when 90 per cent of Muslims in Bengal were peasants, the few Muslim zamindars and other high placed Muslims should come down from their pedestal and join the peasants for the sake of unity.

An important aspect of the Krishak Praja Party leadership was the fact that though it had its quota of zamindars, taluqdars and zotedars, besides locally important personalities such as lawyers, doctors, mukhtars, and some Maulvis and Maulanas, it could not be denied that it was essentially peasant-oriented and radical in its socio-economic outlook. Its election programme was not motivated by electoral gains alone, for its leaders were in the Praja movement from the very beginning. Of course, the reorganization of Muslim League Parliamentary Board on the eve of the election acted as a damper on the Praja movement in that some important Praja leaders like Akram Khan and Principal Ibrahim switched over to the League on one pretext or the other. Nevertheless, the Party maintained its original middle class character with peasant orientation. Whereas the Krishak Praja Party sought to secure support on the basis of its economic programme, i.e. promotion of the interests of Prajas and cultivators, the Muslim League, in contrast, sought to do the same on the ground that it would further the community's interests. While the League insisted that to a Muslim the community's interest was the first consideration, the Krishak Praja Party asserted that unless the economic exploitation of the peasants by zamindars was stopped the community's interests could not be served, because 90 per cent of the Muslims were peasants and cultivators. It was pointed out that since the League did not agree to the abolition of zamindari and to

other changes in the zamindar-praja relationship, voting it to power would mean that Muslim zamindars would join Hindu zamindars to continue exploiting the peasantry.

As early as August 1936, before the unity talks broke down, Fazlul Huq declared in Calcutta in clear terms :

From today will start the terrible and continuous fight between prajas and zamindars everywhere in Bengal's bazars and fields, gardens and forests, land and water, day and night. With the blessings of Allah very soon I will bring end to zamindari.<sup>27</sup>

He also repeated the same promises to peasants and threats to zamindars in his later speeches. Challenging the influence of the Dacca Nawab family over Dacca in an election meeting, he declared :

It is not all a civil war in the Muslim community but it is a fight in which the people of Bengal are divided on a purely economic issue. This issue must be decided first before we can take up any other matter for consideration . . . . The problem of "dal and bhat" and some kind of coarse cloth to cover our nudity is the problem of problems which stares us in the face and which must be solved immediately. This is the very problem which we will have to face as soon as we enter the Council. An obvious and immediate solution to the problem will be by effecting drastic economy in the cost of administration, by reduction of taxations on the poor, by repeal of such taxation as tells heavily on the masses and by a thorough overhauling of the Bengal Tenancy Act and other Acts in the interest of the raiyats. To all these measures zamindars, capitalists and those holding vested interest will offer strenuous opposition.<sup>28</sup>

27. B.D. Habibullah, *Shere-e-Bangla* (Dacca 1966), p. 68.

28. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 16 December 1936. Also quoted in Kalipada Biswas, *Yukta Banglar Sesh Adhyay* (Calcutta 1966), p. 27.

The contest in Patuakhali attracted unprecedented interest. It was no doubt the key constituency so far as the Krishak Praja Party was concerned for, apart from the personalities involved, in it were challenged the zamindari system on the one hand, and the Muslim League and the Government on the other. The Nawab of Dacca also came down to Patuakhali to canvass for Nazimuddin. The incessant talk of Islam, the religious sanction for the Muslim League candidate and the 'futwa' issued by Shah Sufi Maulana Abu Bakr, the famous Pir of Furfura, in favour of Nazimuddin,<sup>29</sup>—all these showed the importance with which this contest was viewed by the League. Muslim students from the Punjab, U.P. and other provinces owing allegiance to the League were brought to Bengal to canvass for Nazimuddin. Maulanas and maulvis from all over Bengal came down to Patuakhali to prevail upon the villagers not to go against Islam and to vote for Nazimuddin.<sup>30</sup>

#### IV

The highlight of the election results was that independent Muslims got the maximum number of seats followed by the Muslim League. The Krishak Praja Party came third. The independents got 43 seats including 2 through special constituencies, the Muslim League 39 seats (out of 82 contested) including 4 from special constituencies, the Krishak Praja Party 36 seats (out of 75 contested) and the Tripura Krishak Samity 5 seats. While all the seats won by the Krishak Praja Party belonged to the rural constituencies (the bulk of them belonging to the eastern districts), the Muslim League secured victories in all types of constituencies, rural (29), urban (6 out of 6) and special (4 out of 4). Interestingly, though the Muslim League obtained more seats, the percentage of votes it polled was less than that of either the Krishak Praja Party or the Independents taken together. The Muslim League polled 61.47 per cent of the urban votes, 26.52 per cent of the rural votes and altogether

29. *Azad*, 17 January 1937.

30. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 10 January 1937.

27.10 per cent of the total Muslim votes. The Krishak Praja Party secured 15.39 per cent of the urban votes, 31.78 per cent of the rural votes and 31.51 per cent of all Muslim votes. The Patuakhali constituency, of course, returned Fazlul Huq who defeated Nazimuddin by 13,742 to 6,308 votes.<sup>31</sup>

The Muslim League performance in Bengal was unexpected and far better than in other Muslim majority provinces (in the Punjab it got only 1 out of the 86 Muslim seats and none out of the 34 and 36 Muslim seats in Sind and the North West Frontier Province respectively). Yet neither the Muslim League nor the Krishak Praja Party was in a position to take a decisive action without the support of independent Muslim members. It was clear that most of them would tend to join the party which had the best chance of forming a ministry—a situation favourable to the Muslim League in case Congress-Krishak Praja Party co-operation did not materialise. In any case, although no single Muslim party emerged in a dominant position, the election results again proved beyond doubt that compartmentalisation of politics into Hindu politics and Muslim politics was complete in Bengal.

## V

The peculiar situation emerging out of the 1937 election set at naught the political advantages the Muslims obtained in Bengal under the 1935 Act because neither of the two Muslim political parties was in a position to form a ministry even in combination with the independent elected Muslim members. Since the Congress had come out as the single largest party it was clear from the beginning that further developments would depend on the pace set by it openly or tacitly. And since the Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party had challenged each other in the election, in the beginning cooperation between the two was ruled out.

It was widely believed that the best combination would be between the Krishak Praja Party and the Congress. With 96 members between them they needed only 30 more to form a

31. Government of India, Home Political File 129/37; Return showing the Results of Elections in India 1937, *Command Papers* (Cnd. 5589).



stable government, and this they could easily get from among the independent members. Being the largest party, the Congress had the primary responsibility to form a ministry but the indecision of the All India Congress Committee about acceptance of office stood in its way. In this situation and in the face of rising expectations, the possibilities in respect of cabinet formation, pending decision of the AICC, were: (a) the Congress could have formed a coalition with the Krishak Praja Party on the basis of a minimum programme for the purpose of ministry making without itself joining the ministry, or (b) it could have helped Fazlul Huq in forming a coalition government with its passive support by not joining the opposition.

In spite of all the favourable circumstances, the Congress-Krishak Praja Party *rapprochement* did not materialise. The election results were out by the end of January and leaders of the Congress and the Krishak Praja Party held talks about co-operation in early February.<sup>32</sup> In the beginning, the negotiations had reached a stage when signatures on the final agreement were awaited. At this point disagreements arose on the question of implementation of the programme of the ministry, particularly in regard to political prisoners.<sup>33</sup> When negotiations with the Congress ultimately failed, the only alternative was a coalition with the Muslim League which was immediately effected. On 13 February 1937, the *Star of India* in a special late edition published a statement issued by Fazlul Huq, Ispahani, Shamsuddin Ahmad, H.S. Suhrawardy and K. Habibullah to the effect that the leaders of the Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party had agreed to cooperate for the purpose of working the constitution. The statement ran as follows:

In response to the very strong feeling in the Province that the Muslim members of the Bengal Legislative

32. The evidences are (1) different dailies in Calcutta such as *Forward*, *Advance*, the *Statesman*, *Star of India*, and in Bengali *Azad*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* of February 1937; (2) Humayun Kabir, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1906-42* (Calcutta, 1943), p. 13; and (3) the author's interviews with some of the Bengal leaders in Calcutta and Dacca.

33. Ahmad, n. 2, p. 136.

Assembly should work together and the desire expressed by all the members that could be consulted, the leaders of the League and Praja parties have decided to cooperate under the leadership of Mr. A.K. Fazlul Huq for the purpose of working the constitution and, as a result of discussions, have arrived at an agreement subject to the ratification of the parties.

Thereafter, a meeting of the members of the Muslim League Parliamentary Board who had won the election and also a meeting of the executive committee of the Krishak Praja Party held on 14 February 1937 and 15 February 1937, respectively, approved the move by the leaders for a "Praja-League combine". The formal agreement was reached very soon and Fazlul Huq and the Nawab of Dacca issued a statement announcing this on 26 February.

It is generally believed that the Congress refusal to extend its active or tacit support compelled Fazlul Huq to join hands with the Muslim League which assured the latter's ascendancy in Bengal in later years. The indecision of the AICC about office acceptance, of course, stood in the way of assumption of power by the Congress,<sup>34</sup> but it is important to consider what prevented it from reaching a working agreement with the Krishak Praja Party and thereby stopping the Muslim League from coming to power in Bengal.

Some have blamed the Congress High Command for its failure to appreciate the peculiar situation arising out of the election results in Bengal. Even if it was not prepared to permit formation of Congress ministries as long as the problem created by the provision of special powers for the governors in their relationship with the ministries was not settled to its satisfaction, it could have asked the Congress leaders in Bengal to support the Krishak Praja Ministry without joining it. Thus a rare opportunity to establish friendly relations with at least a section of Muslim leadership was allowed to pass. The Bengal Congress leaders also seem to have failed to realize the nature of the challenge and opportunity

34. Kabir, n. 32, p. 17. Also B.M. Choudhury, *Muslim Politics in India* (Calcutta, 1965), p. 41.

tunity unfolded by the election results. Missing the main point that they had been virtually reduced to the position of leading only the Hindus but could again win the confidence of Muslims by cooperating with those of their leaders with whom such co-operation was possible, they attached greater importance to certain other issues in the course of their negotiations with leaders of the Krishak Praja Party. According to comments published in the contemporary press, one of these issues was the release of the security prisoners. As *Forward* wrote on 22 February 1937:

We are in a position to state that the proposal for a combination of the Congress Party and the Praja Party in order to form the first Ministry in Bengal has been finally dropped. The inclusion of the release of political prisoners in the programme of the Praja Party roused the hope that the Congress party and Praja Party might work together either in opposition or in office but it has been discovered . . . that the Praja leaders are not prepared to make the question a cause of war with the Governor and all they intend is to move resolutions in the Assembly recommending that course . . . . It was impossible for the Congress Party on such a term, for to accept the term would be an indirect admission on the part of Congress members that it would be risky to release the detenus.

Abul Mansur Ahmad has described in detail these negotiations as he was one of the participants. He said in order to sign the final agreement, the leaders of the Krishak Praja Party and the Congress assembled at the residence of J.M. Sengupta. While the items in the agreed programme were (1) To demand self-government ; (2) to release political prisoners ; (3) to amend the Tenancy Act ; (4) to enact Debtor Act, etc., Mansur Ahmed wanted to change this priority and to put item (2) after items (3) and (4). The argument put forward was that if the Governor used his veto on the question of release of political prisoners and the ministry resigned without doing anything for amelioration of the sufferings of the

peasantry, the Krishak Praja Party would be betraying its election pledges. So he wanted the ministry to enact some legislations for peasants and then to raise the issue of release of political prisoners. To this the Congress leaders refused to agree. The discussion went on for hours, both sides insisting on their point and lastly broke on this score. The League on the other hand was prepared to accept all the conditions of the Krishak Praja Party, i.e. Prime Ministership of Fazlul Huq and the KPP programme in full if it agreed to cooperate with the League.<sup>35</sup>

According to some the negotiations between the Congress and the Krishak Praja Party broke down because of obstinate insistence of Fazlul Huq on the inclusion of Nalini Ranjan Sarkar in the Cabinet in which the Congress leaders were not prepared to acquiesce. Sarkar was once a well-known Congress leader but had left the Congress and, it was said, was the financial supporter of Fazlul Huq. He was aspirant for ministership and indispensable for Fazlul Huq too. It is interesting to note that Sarkar played an important role in bringing about *rapprochement* between the Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party and they reached agreement in his house.<sup>36</sup>

Thus for various reasons the Bengal Congress leaders also failed to realise the importance of supporting Fazlul Huq. There could be no question of these leaders trying to induce the Congress High Command to give up its indecision.

## VI

Fazlul Huq formed a ministry of eleven members. Besides

35. Ahmad, n. 2, pp. 136-7.

36. Biswas, n. 28, pp. 32 and 36-37. Humayun Kabir also mentioned in his interview to the author that it was not possible for Fazlul Huq to part either with Nalini Ranjan Sarkar or with Nawab Musharruff Hossain of Jalpaiguri and this was responsible to some extent for the break between the Congress and the Krishak Praja Party leaders.

Nalini Ranjan Sarkar afterwards lamented to his political friends that he had to repeat the role of "Omichand" of Plassey. Mentioned also by A.C. Guha in his interview to the author. How far all these whisperings were correct is difficult to say but these were widely believed at that time.

the Chief Minister, five were Muslims and five Hindus, though the cooperating Hindus constituted the smallest group in the coalition.<sup>37</sup> This was welcomed by many, though it could hardly satisfy Hindus as a whole, who blamed Fazlul Huq for the failure of negotiations with the Congress and for taking Hindus of no consequence in the cabinet.<sup>38</sup> Of the Muslims ministers it was decided to have three from the Muslim League and three from the Krishak Praja Party. These were Nawab Habibulla, Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy from the Muslim League and Fazlul Huq, Nausher Ali and Shamsuddin from the Krishak Praja Party. On the day before the submission of the final list of ministers to the Governor, Shamsuddin was dropped and Musharruff Hossain of the Muslim League taken in his place.<sup>39</sup> That made the position of the Muslim League with 4 members in the cabinet stronger than that of the Krishak Praja Party,<sup>40</sup> which had

37. *Star of India*, 25 March, 1937. In his press interview Fazlul Huq said: "To the great Hindu community, I have cheerfully given an equal representation in the Cabinet with the Muslims because I recognise that although the exigencies of a political situation may have reduced the proportion of cooperative Hindus in the legislature to the position of a negligible minority, the representation to which any community is entitled in the counsels of Government must be determined by much higher consideration than the mere counting of heads of its members in the legislature."

38. There was an attempt to include Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in the Cabinet which could not be done because of the strong opposition of Muslims. The Bengal Muslim Youngmen League in an executive meeting held on 1 April 1937 passed a resolution to the effect: "This meeting learns with surprise and resentment that Prof. Humayun Kabir, M.L.C., tried his utmost for the inclusion of Mr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, in the Cabinet in utter disregard of the wishes of the entire Muslim students for reasons best known to him." *Star of India*, 5 April 1937.

39. According to Ahmad, n. 2, p. 142, the Governor did not agree to take Shamsuddin in the Cabinet because of secret I.B. report against him. On the other hand, Muhammad Waliullah tells us that Musharruff Hossain could manage to get into the Cabinet at the eleventh hour by unscrupulous means. Muhammad Waliullah, *Yug-Bhiktra* (Dacca, 1967), p. 343.

40. Though it was claimed by Fazlul Huq and his supporters that Musharruff Hossain signed the creed of Krishak Praja Party, in fact he continued to remain a member of the Muslim League Council, Jinnah included him in the Bengal Committee of the Muslim League which he nominated at the Lucknow Session in October 1937.

three, including the Prime Minister. The rest of the ministers, who were Hindus, did not belong to any party. Obviously, the first ministry in Bengal under Provincial Autonomy amounted to a Muslim League dominated ministry.

The portfolios were distributed as follows : Fazlul Huq—Education; Nalini Ranjan Sarkar—Finance; Nazimuddin<sup>41</sup>—Home; Bijoy Prasad Singh Roy—Revenue; Habibullah—Agriculture and Industry; Srish Chandra Nandi—Communication and Works; Suhrawardy—Commerce and Labour; Musharruff Hossain—Judiciary and Legislature; Nausher Ali—Local Self-Government; P. Deb Raikat—Excise and Forest; and M.B. Mullick—Cooperation, Credit and Rural Indebtedness. This distribution displeased the Muslim League members.

A look at the composition of the cabinet, its personnel and the distribution of portfolios would lead to the conclusion that it was simply impossible to carry out the election programme of the Krishak Praja Party and that Fazlul Huq was at the mercy of reactionary groups and vested interests represented by the Nalini-Nazimuddin-Musharruff-B.P. Singh Roy combine. This situation had been partly forced on him by the Congress party. His own party men very soon left him. The selection of personnel of the ministry was strongly resented by Krishak Praja Party leaders as nine out of eleven members were from the zamindar class and at least 6 had been elected by special constituencies not having any contact with the people at large.<sup>42</sup> It was rightly pointed out that such a ministry could hardly bring about any substantial change in the land tenure system and in the money lender-debtor relations. The three caste Hindu ministers, it was complained, had no following in the legislature.

The selection of ministers did not also satisfy Hindus—Congress or non-Congress. A spokesman of the latter commented : "Mr. Fazlul Huq got elected as leader of the Praja

41. Nazimuddin was elected to the Assembly on 25 February 1937 in a bye-election held in the North Calcutta Constituency given up by Suhrawardy who had got himself elected from two seats.

42. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 31 March 1937. 28 prominent leaders of the Krishak Praja Party issued a statement on 30 March 1937 bringing these allegations.

Party. But in his cabinet the advocates of ryats, if any, will be clearly outvoted by those of the landlords . . .". It was also alleged that one could not find in his cabinet "a majority definitely in favour of an anti-repression policy and strong enough to try firmly to give effect to it in the face of almost certain gubernatorial opposition".<sup>44</sup>

This was the beginning of Fazlul Huq's rupture with the Krishak Praja Party. This rupture and the attitude of the Congress in the first few months of his ministry compelled him to join the Muslim League publicly in October 1937 at its Lucknow session. Thus begun a new chapter in his life as well as in the history of Muslim politics in Bengal.

The main cause of friction between the Congress and the Krishak Praja Party was, as mentioned earlier, the question of release of political prisoners. While the Congress wanted a definite undertaking on this point, the Krishak Praja Party was non-committal. When Fazlul Huq combined with reactionary Hindu and Muslim League leaders, it was clear his position depended on their support only. There were other factors also. The solid bloc of European members who commanded 10 per cent of the Assembly votes also supported this combination. It was a precarious situation for Fazlul Huq.

The obvious course left for the Congress after the breakdown of talks with Fazlul Huq was to go to the opposition. In the new Assembly the Congress committed the first mistake—a Himalayan blunder<sup>45</sup>—at the time of election of Speaker. The coalition supported by the European bloc put up Khan Bahadur (later Sir) Azizul Haque for Speakership. Two others in the contest were Kumar Sibsekhareswar Roy whom the Congress supported and Tamizuddin Khan who was supported by the Independent group of the Krishak Praja Party which had by this time broken away from Fazlul Huq. The leaders of the independent Krishak Praja Party, it is said, requested

44. *Modern Review*, April 1937, Editor's note, p. 488. It was also complained there that Shyama Prasad who, it was rumoured, would be taken into the Cabinet and placed in charge of education was not included "because of the opposition of some Muhammadan communalists."

45. Biswas, n. 28, p. 104.

Sarat Bose to support Tamizuddin which he refused. In the first ballot Azizul Haque got 116, Sibsekhareswar 83 and Tamizuddin 42 votes. In the second voting when Tamizuddin's name was dropped, Azizul Haque got 158 and Sibsekhareswar 82 votes. If the Congress had supported Tamizuddin it would have in all probability meant victory of the opposition. The Congress failure to support Tamizuddin injected a fresh dose of communal feeling into the legislative politics of Bengal.

The unaccommodating tone of the Congress leadership during the early months of his Prime Ministership created a vicious circle for Fazlul Huq. The ministry was essentially a Muslim League ministry depending as he knew on the support of the extreme section of Muslim opinion in Bengal. To get this ministry agree to his programme he badly needed the support of all progressive sections so that he could take bold initiatives. The total rejection of the ministry and also of Fazlul Huq by Congress leaders and Hindus in Bengal afforded him hardly any scope to improve his position in the ministry. Their constant criticism and personal attacks at public meetings and in the press, in fact, made his position weaker.<sup>46</sup> Within a few months he came to feel that in the situation created by outright Congress opposition he could bank only on the anti-Hindu feeling of a section of Muslims to sustain him and his ministry.

The other compulsion for Fazlul Huq was the rupture with his own party which made his position precarious in the coalition. When Shamsuddin Ahmed was dropped and Musharruff Hossain taken into the cabinet an important section of the Praja leaders were dissatisfied. This section, however, regarded it as inadvisable to dissociate with Fazlul Huq at this moment which would have meant leaving him entirely at the mercy of the zamindar clique.<sup>47</sup> To keep the dissidents in good humour the party leadership decided to form an "advisory board" with 3 members from the Muslim League and 3 from the Krishak Praja Party to chalk out a common programme for the ministry on the basis of election promises of the two parties. The

46. *Advance*, 4 July 1937, editorial.

47. Ahmad, n. 2, p. 147.



Muslim League was represented on the board by Habibullah, Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy and the Krishak Praja Party by Fazlul Huq, Nausher Ali and Abul Mansur Ahmad. But soon there was disagreement on the question of ministers' salary and abolition of zamindari. Matters came to a head when Shamsuddin Ahmed, secretary of the Krishak Praja Party, and 20 other MLAs went to the press to charge Fazlul Huq of breach of the election pledges.<sup>48</sup> Earlier Humayun Kabir, MLA and an important member of the Krishak Praja Party, sounded a note of warning in his speech at a dinner in the house of Fazlul Huq on 20 July 1937 saying that "nobody would be able to break the present ministry unless ministers themselves break it. They ought to bear it in mind that the programme of the ministry is more important than its personnel. . . . If the ministry do not work mere invocation of Islam and Quran will not succeed in saving it".<sup>49</sup> Fazlul Huq convened a meeting of the Bengal Krishak Praja Assembly Party on 1 September 1937, expelled 17 members and got elected new office-bearers.<sup>50</sup> This was obviously an extreme step. His remark at the meeting brought out his apprehension about Congress designs. He said, "they have already deserted our camp and are persistently strengthening the hands of the opposition even at this juncture when all the forces of the opposition are being mobilised to discredit the present cabinet".<sup>51</sup>

When he broke with the important section of the Krishak Praja Party, his party became a minority group in the coalition. And this established the claim of the leader of the Muslim League to prime ministership. Already British bureaucrats, the members of the European bloc in the Assembly and the non-Bengali Muslim trading community of Calcutta were trying to get Nazimuddin as Prime Minister, and this Fazlul

48. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Advance*, 19 August 1937; *Star of India*, 20 August 1937, however, brought out a counter statement by 32 members of Krishak Praja Assembly Party refuting this charge.

49. *Advance*, 29 July 1937.

50. The new Krishak Praja Assembly Party had 32 members now. When Fazlul Huq joined the ministry many independent MLAs joined the Krishak Praja Party who remained with him after this split.

51. *Star of India*, 1 September 1937.

Huq knew.<sup>52</sup> Thus inside the coalition he faced the attack of the Muslim League and in the legislature the combined attack of the Congress and the dissident Krishak Praja Party. Within six months he realised that to save the ministry it was necessary to join the Muslim League and to satisfy the Muslim League it was necessary to arouse communal, i.e. anti-Hindu, passions.

Fazlul Huq finally broke with the Krishak Praja Party in the beginning of September and joined the All-India Muslim League at its annual session in Lucknow in October 1937.

This situation favoured Jinnah. The year 1936-37 was a period of great crisis in All India Muslim League politics. Till then the League had hardly any root in the politics of any of the Muslim majority provinces. This discredited Jinnah, exploded the myth of the slogan of "Muslim interests" and brought to ridicule his claim that the League was an all-India party. The 1937 election results, therefore, necessitated recasting of emphasis on Bengal and the Punjab, the two largest Muslim majority provinces, for safeguarding all India "Muslim interests". The projection of the League as an all-India Muslim political party also needed the support of the Muslim majority provinces. Jinnah also now realised the potentiality of Fazlul Huq and Sikandar Hayat Khan as leaders of Muslims in Bengal and the Punjab.

The British Government, it was known, was pampering the Muslim League in order to have an alternative to the Congress. The results of the 1937 elections added realism to British thinking. Attempts were then made to inject Bengal and the Punjab into all-India Muslim politics through their own leaders. But the British took precautions to prevent passing of Muslim leadership into the hands of leaders from Muslim majority provinces which might have led to growth of provincialism in which even Muslims in minority provinces in the interest of their collective security might have drifted towards the all-India policy of the Congress. This would have proved detrimental to British interests. The main concern of

52. The Hindu press from the beginning hinted at it. Muslim League leaders, it pointed out, agreed to put this old man on their shoulder only to prevent the formation of a Congress-supported ministry. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 18 April 1937.

the British at that time was to air the Muslim demand through Bengal and the Punjab under an all-India leadership.

Fazlul Huq led the contingent of Bengal delegates to the annual session of the League in Lucknow. At the League Council meeting on the evening of 15 October, 1937 he was embraced by Jinnah amidst deafening shouts of "Allah-o-Akbar" and Fazlul Huq declared that "he would be under the banner of the League without any reservation". Sikandar Hayat Khan, the Muslim Premier of the Punjab, also attended the session and entered into an agreement with Jinnah whereby he joined the Muslim League and agreed to advise all Muslim members of his party who were not members of the League already, to sign its creed. But he made it very clear that this would not prejudice their position as members of the Unionist Party in the Cabinet. But Fazlul Huq declared that the "Praja Party was a non-communal organisation with an economic programme while the League was the political body of the Muslims".<sup>53</sup>

The importance of the Lucknow session for the development of Muslim League politics in Bengal was tremendous. Firstly, it assured the stability of the ministry and strengthened the leadership of Fazlul Huq over Muslims in Bengal. Secondly, it established the credentials of the League as the only Muslim political party in Bengal. Thus started the consolidation of League politics in Bengal.

The Lucknow session was also a unique success for Jinnah. He succeeded in projecting the demands of Muslims in India through leaders of the Muslim majority provinces. It exalted the position of the League as a Muslim political party in the eyes of Muslims all over India, established the claim of Jinnah that the League was an all-India Muslim party and provided him with a platform to bargain with both the Congress and the British. Muslim politics of Bengal had definitely made a significant contribution to this development.

53. Statement issued to Associated Press on 15 October 1937. *Star of India*, 17 October 1937.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE FIRST FAZLUL HUQ MINISTRY AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF MUSLIM LEAGUE 1937-1941

The tenure of the Fazlul Huq Ministry (1937-41) may amply be described as a period of consolidation of the Muslim League's power and influence in Bengal. As noticed in the previous chapter, the League was the dominant partner in the coalition government from the very beginning even though the Prime Minister belonged to the Krishak Praja Party. After the revolt of a section of that party against Fazlul Huq's leadership and his formally joining the League at its Lucknow session, the dominant position of the League in the Government became even more marked. This enabled it to take credit for all the beneficial measures which were adopted by the ministry and thus strengthen its hold over the Muslim masses as well as the elite. The constant opposition and criticism of the ministry by Hindus—Congress and non-Congress—clearly brought home to them that Hindu interests and Muslim interests could never be identical in Bengal. This helped strengthen the process of polarisation in Bengal politics.

As the first item of its programme, the ministry promised to set up immediately a committee to devise ways and means for replacing the existing land revenue system in Bengal based on the Permanent Settlement, but it did not initiate any measure for this purpose for quite some time. It was only after the combined pressure of the opposition consisting of the Congress, the Krishak Praja Party (dissident) and the Independent Praja Party forced the issue in the legislature that the Government decided to appoint a Land Revenue Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Francis Floud towards the end of 1938. Its recommendations calling for replacement of the Permanent Settlement and the zamindari

system by a raiyatwari method were never implemented.<sup>1</sup>

In the meanwhile, however, the Government adopted a number of beneficial legislative measures for ameliorating the sufferings of the peasantry. The first such measure was the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Act, 1938, introduced in September 1937. There is no doubt that this Act marks a significant stage in the development of progressive land laws in Bengal and conferred many benefits on the tenants. The landlord's transfer fee known as *Salami*, their right of pre-emption introduced under the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Act 1928 and the right to realise rent by certificate procedure were abolished. The tenants were given the right to recover diluvial land within 20 years on payment of only four years' rent while, at the same time, the under-ryots with occupancy rights, who came into existence either before or after 1928, were given rights similar to those enjoyed by occupancy ryots, including the right to surrender their holdings. The rate of interest payable by ryots on arrears of rent was reduced from 12½ per cent to 6½ per cent. All the provisions under the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Act 1928 concerning the enhancement of rent, including section 52 of the Act which conferred on a landlord the right to receive additional rent, were suspended for a period of 10 years. The tenants could also sub-divide the land.<sup>2</sup>

These benefits, however, fell far short of the expectations raised by the ministry's programme which had talked of replacing the existing land revenue system of Bengal. This was clear from the large number of amendments to the Tenancy Amendment Bill proposed by non-official members in the very first session of the legislature. Several members

1. *Report of the Land Revenue Commission* (Calcutta, 1940), vol. II, pp. 49-61. The Commission submitted its report in 1940 and towards the end of the year the Bengal Government appointed an officer, C.W. Gurner, to examine the recommendations, summarise its conclusions and suggest means that should be adopted to implement these recommendations. The report of Gurner along with the Commission's recommendations were placed on the table of the Assembly on 28-29 July 1941 for members' discussion but no action was taken later on.

2. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 1937, vol. LI, no. 4, pp. 1319-1403, 2274-2315.

of the Krishak Praja Party criticised the cabinet's land policy and issued statements accusing Fazlul Huq of betraying his own party. Ultimately these members broke away from the coalition party. The Nikhil Banga Krishak Praja Samity and the Assembly Krishak Praja Party were reorganised expelling Fazlul Huq and the other Krishak Praja Party members who continued in the coalition.<sup>3</sup>

The other important measures initiated by the ministry included establishment of Debt Settlement Boards in all the districts. No doubt the Bengal Agricultural Debtors' Act 1935 had been enacted earlier, but the Fazlul Huq ministry took prompt measures to give immediate effect to this Act which earlier was put into operation for one year only. By 1938 about 3,000 village conciliation boards had been set up. These boards settled claims amounting to Rs. 36,716,202 by 1938 and the amount awarded on these claims was of the order of Rs. 17,87,818 while the pending claims amounted to Rs. 260,954,30.<sup>4</sup> The Agricultural Debtors' (Second Amendment) Act 1940 which covered all types of loans was extensively enforced. More striking than the above legislations was the Bengal Money-lenders Act 1940 which made it obligatory for all persons in the money-lending business, i.e. *Mahajans*, to obtain trade licences after registering themselves with the Government. The maximum rate of interest for secured and unsecured loans was fixed at 6 per cent and 8 per cent respectively.<sup>5</sup>

The above Acts benefitting the peasantry made the ministry popular among the masses. Though the tenants, ryots and under-ryots were not given the proprietary rights of their holdings and nothing was done with a view to restricting jute production and fixing minimum price of jute by this ministry,<sup>6</sup> these Acts afforded great relief to the peasantry.

3. Report of the fifth annual general meeting of the Nikhil Banga Krishak Praja Samity held on 11 September 1937. *Advance* (Calcutta), 14 September 1937.

4. Azizul Haque, *The Man Behind the Plough* (Calcutta, 1939), p. 169.

5. *The Bengal Money-lenders Act, 1940* (Calcutta, 1940). This was preceded by the Bengal Money-lenders Act 1933.

6. Speech of Shamsuddin Ahmed, Secretary, Krishak Praja Party, 11 November 1940. *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), 12 November 1940.

True, the Debtors' Act could not break the supremacy of the money-lending classes but it helped to scale down the debt of the peasantry<sup>7</sup> and along with the Money-lenders Act and the Tenancy Act saved it from the crushing burden of debt and illegal exaction by zamindars, intermediaries and *Mahajans*. The result was that an image of the ministry along with the party was created in the eyes of Muslims. The ministry and the League became synonymous to them.

Next to the land and revenue policy, the education policy of the ministry needs analysis. In both the programmes of the coalition party and that of ministry assurances were given that there would be immediate introduction of free compulsory primary education without taxation of the poor who were unable to bear the burden.<sup>8</sup> This policy the ministry shelved on the ground that the introduction of free primary education without taxation was not possible because of its financial condition. Instead it turned its attention towards secondary education. "The inefficient secondary education available in this province", argued Fazlul Huq as he talked about the backward condition of Muslims while introducing the Bengal Secondary Education Bill 1940, on 21 August 1940, "is one of the main causes of our comparatively slow progress."<sup>9</sup> The Bill, based on the report of the Sadler Commission, appointed twenty years ago, sought to remove secondary education from the control of Calcutta University and to establish a Secondary Education Board to regulate it. It was hoped that Muslim interests would be sufficiently represented on this Board. The general Hindu opposition to this measure only served to highlight its importance in Muslim eyes.

Indeed, Muslims by and large felt that the creation of the Secondary Education Board would give them a say in the control of the educational system of the province. It was this feeling which prompted them to support the measure

7. Serajul Islam, "Bengal Peasantry in Debt, 1904-1945", a paper read in the Seminar on "The Life and Times of Fazlul Huq" at Dacca during 11-13 November 1973, p. 13.

8. Fazlul Huq, 18 March 1938, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*: vol. LII, no. 5, p. 36.

9. *Ibid.*, 21 August 1940, session 8, vol. LVII, no. 5, p. 60.

whole-heartedly. The Hindu opposition appeared to them as inspired by communal feelings, bent upon discrediting the ministry and depriving Muslims of their legitimate share.<sup>10</sup>

That the intention of the measures was not only educational was pointed out by W.C. Wordsworth who, while supporting the measure on behalf of the European group, remarked : "any board must, in the present condition, satisfy the strongest party on which the Government depended and so it contained a dose of communalism."<sup>11</sup>

A study of the different grants made to educational institutions during 1937 to 1940 would show that the Government lavishly sanctioned grants for madrasas and other Muslim educational institutions. In 1938 the Government sanctioned a sum of Rs. 50,000 for the purchase of land for a college for Muslim girls; eventually the Lady Brabourne College, a degree college primarily for the education of Muslim girls of Calcutta, was established in Park Circus, a preponderantly Muslim area with cent per cent grants from the Government whereas all the educational institutions, including colleges, established by Hindus, were expected to draw support largely from private contributions though they received some aid from the Government. In 1940, Government aid to Sanskrit tols and Buddhist schools was discontinued. A part of the grant to Calcutta University was also discontinued from that year.<sup>12</sup>

The same policy was followed in the field of rural development. Around improvement of rural areas and uplift of the rural population was a part of the Government's policy<sup>13</sup> and with this end in view a considerable sum was added to the discretionary grants of the commissioners and district magistrates.<sup>14</sup> Suhrawardy, minister-in-charge of the department, in his speech on the floor of the Assembly on

10. *Star of India*, 26 August 1940.

11. W.C. Wordsworth, 27 August 1940, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LVII, no. 5, p. 261.

12. Budgets for the years 1937-40.

13. *Two Years of Provincial Autonomy*—Published by Director, Publicity, Government of Bengal, August 1939.

14. Government of Bengal, Circular letter no. 6527, dated 20 September 1937, Home Political File 60-z of 1937.



16 March 1939 unfolded the ministry's plan for a comprehensive rural reconstruction drive. He said that "in order to assist the various rural reconstruction committees the Government proposed to appoint 27 district rural reconstruction officers, 26 propaganda officers, and 250 organisers whose jurisdiction would extend to a Thana." He proposed to raise the number of organisers to 600 in 1939-40, so as to cover the entire province.<sup>15</sup>

While it took two years to lay down the scheme, actual work did not start till 1940. The crux of the problem was that while the responsibility for the execution and maintenance of rural reconstruction project was entrusted to district officers, the grants out of which these projects were financed were not made over to district boards and a large number of officers were appointed for the work which could have been done by the district officials. "There seems to be considerable divergence of opinion", remarked the Commissioner of Chittagong raising objection to the scheme, "as to how the organization should proceed".<sup>16</sup>

Yet there is no doubt that this programme did achieve some results. In the annual reports on political events in Bengal for the years 1937 to 1940, the Government enumerated the successes of the rural reconstruction programmes such as clearance of khals, re-excavation of rivers, improvement in communication by land and water, establishment of union board dispensaries, the formation of the two model villages in Noakhali district, etc. These activities enabled a large number of poor persons in the villages to secure gainful employment,<sup>17</sup> and the Muslim League to increase its cadre.

The activities of the Department of Commerce and Labour also contributed to the popularity of the ministry. The industrial unrest fostered by the Congress and also by the Communists since 1932 reached a new peak with the inauguration of

15. H.S. Suhrawardy, 16 March 1939, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LIV, no. 3, pp. 395-403.

16. C. B. Memo no. 22879 dated 15 May 1940 from the Commissioner, Chittagong, Home Political File 60-z of 1940.

17. A brief summary of political events in the province of Bengal during 1937, 1939, 1940—an annual report submitted by the Government of Bengal to the Government of India.

Provincial Autonomy in 1937. The elections gave them an admirable opportunity to extend their influence and organize support. The result was a series of serious strikes in the mills in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. Because the Congress movement in Bengal did not get any outlet through sharing of power, it concentrated on fostering industrial and agricultural unrests which were sure to become a source of trouble to the ministry. This impressed upon the ministry the necessity of a sound and comprehensive labour policy. Suhrawardy Minister for Commerce and Labour, described the labour policy of the Government as one of "promotion of welfare measures by legislative and administrative action and by negotiation with the employees, secondly by intervention in industrial disputes by setting up a conciliatory machinery, etc."<sup>18</sup> The Government also undertook an intensive study of the trade union movement with a view to framing a definite policy towards "recognition of such organisations as were genuine and not mere cloaks for propagation of revolutionary ideals".<sup>19</sup>

The main plank in the Government's policy was "the promotion of industrial peace by the encouragement of unions guided by constitutional principles".<sup>20</sup> As a result of this policy there began to emerge slowly but steadily "White Flag Unions" and the Government branded the other unions as "Red Flag Unions" emphasizing their communist character irrespective of the fact whether they were under the guidance of the Congress or Communist leadership. In 1939 the Trade Union Constitution Tribunal recognised only 27 out of the 61 unions which applied to it.

This labour policy contributed significantly to consolidation of Suhrawardy's position in the Muslim League and consolidation of the position of the League inside the cabinet. During his ministership Suhrawardy was also the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League from 1937 to 1943. He reaped maximum benefit out of these positions for the party

18. Government of Bengal, Commerce & Labour File 3A-48 of 1938.

19. Government of India, Home Political File 132/38—Industrial Review of Bengal during 1937.

20. Government of India, Home Political File 66/40—Industrial Review of Bengal during 1938.

and for himself. Through labour intelligence officers Suhrawardy injected his own men into labour politics and thereby succeeded in effecting a split among labour unions. The Government-supported unions, i.e. the "White Unions" mentioned earlier, were the result of this drive. The rise in the number of Muslim labour unions during this period was a clear measure of the success of Suhrawardy. These were included in the cadre of the Muslim League and gave to the party, (1) a platform for agitational politics, and (2) popularity among the labour class.<sup>21</sup> In addition, they made Suhrawardy the undisputed leader of urban Muslims, including both labour and petty businessmen in Calcutta, who were mostly 'up-country' Muslims, and among whom he was already well known as Secretary of the Khilafat Committee for many years. Suhrawardy's knowledge of Urdu and his ability to mix with this section freely gave them a feeling of affinity towards him. Thus he succeeded not only in bringing stability to the ministry by quelling labour opposition but also deprived the Congress of the support of a section of the labour class of Calcutta and its industrial suburbs.

In the beginning the Muslim League government was too slow to understand the importance of propaganda work in a multi-party democratic set-up, particularly when the stability of the ministry depended on the balance of various interest groups in the legislature. When the ministry was to face a trial of strength in the legislature and the talk of a combined no-confidence motion by the Congress and the Krishak Praja Party against the ministry in the monsoon of 1938 got currency, the ministry hurriedly decided to create a separate department of publicity under the Prime Minister with the Chief Secretary as Secretary. The Director of Public Information was authorised to put up certain files direct before the Prime Minister. A trusted man of Suhrawardy, Altaf Hossain, was appointed Director of Public Information. Elaborate delegation of power was made to him, giving him control over expenditure of

21. During 1938-40 these 'White Unions' helped the Government to bring many industrial disputes to successful end and they were readily accepted by the employees.

contingency charges in different departments meant for publicity work.

The two weeklies published by this department—*Bengal Weekly* (in English) and *Banglar Katha* (in Bengali)—while emphasizing the work done by the ministry for the toiling masses did not fail to emphasize the point that under the earlier regimes Muslims were the worst sufferers. The propaganda machinery of the Government was extensively utilized for enlisting support for the Government which ultimately led to the increase in the popularity of the Muslim League among Muslims.

A concerted attempt was made by the ministry to increase control over local bodies. In 1939 the Government issued instructions to the local bodies "not to propose for appointment to local bodies persons who were known to be actively opposed to the policy of the Ministry".<sup>22</sup> It was also stressed therein that the local bodies, especially union boards, should be utilized in an increasing degree for the purpose of implementing schemes for rural uplift and that every attempt should be made to secure association of supporters of the ministry with the administration of the local bodies. Next the Government decided to make nominations to the union boards subject to administrative control of the provincial Government by making necessary amendments to Section 6(3) of the Village Self-Government Act 1919 and thus bringing under its control the nomination of one-third members to the union boards.<sup>23</sup> This was in contrast to the situation in the Congress-governed provinces where the ministry did away with the system of nomination and the entire membership of local bodies was made elective.

The benefit which accrued in the process to the Government as well as to the party in power was immense. The ministry

22. Government of Bengal, Local Self-Government Circular no. 428 (5)-L.S.G., dated 19 April 1939, File 20-3 of 1938.

23. Section 6 (3) of Village Self-Government Act 1919 provided that Government could decide that in case of every union board one-third of the members would be appointed by the District Magistrate on the ground that "such appointment is necessary for the due of representation of minority and of different interests within the union".

could now approach the union boards direct, and the power of nomination gave them a say in their affairs. This automatically led to the consolidation of the Muslim League in various places. As an illustration of this point the case of the Jessore Board can be quoted. "The Chairman of the District Board, Jessore has been removed by the Government", said a provincial report of 1939, "as a result of a resolution by a majority of Board's members. This has been generally welcomed by the people of the district who regard it as a victory for efficient and honest local government and also a triumph for the Muslim League, the late chairman being a creation of the ex-Minister Nausher Ali who has now developed into a Krishak and Communist agitator".<sup>24</sup>

The Government framed rules to change the educational qualifications of voters prescribed under the 1935 Act. In 1939 it decided on adoption of Indian school examination as a franchise qualification for the Bengal Legislative Assembly and laid the rule that the voters under this category will be registered on application and that the onus of the proof of the qualification will be on applicants. The alteration increased the number of Muslim voters and afforded scope to the Government to re-arrange and/or change the voters' list to the advantage of the party in power. A change was also introduced by the Home Department in the cadre of executive service by revising the total sanctioned strength of the Bengal Civil Service (Ex) and the Bengal Junior Civil Service from 322 and 450 respectively in 1937 to 232 and 560 in 1939. It also accepted the principle of substitution of Bengal Civil Service officers by officers of the Bengal Junior Civil Service. The drastic cut in the cadre of Bengal Civil Service (Ex) officers and substantial increase in the cadre of Bengal Junior Civil Service was done by the Home Department, it can be argued, to facilitate the entry of Muslims into the civil service. In 1937 it was ordered that two out of every three direct recruits to the post of Deputy Superintendents of Police should be filled up by Muslims.<sup>25</sup>

The contribution of the Mohammedan Sporting Club, the

24. Fortnightly report from Bengal for the fortnight 16-31 July 1939. Government of India, Home Political File 18/7/1939.

25. Government of Bengal, Home-Appointment File 6E-20 of 1937.

leading Muslim football club in Calcutta, in making the Muslim League popular in Bengal was not insignificant.<sup>26</sup> The series of victories achieved by this club, even in the all-India competitions, considerably increased the prestige of the party. Its effect on Muslim fans "was simply electrifying"<sup>27</sup> and a number of Mohammedan Sporting Clubs were established in the districts and sub-divisional towns.

The fact that the Muslim League was in power helped it in getting Government patronage.<sup>28</sup> Nazimuddin allotted plot No. 41 at Calcutta Maidan solely to the club in violation of the existing rules prescribed for it, and also stood surety on the club's behalf to the extent of Rs. 12,000/-.

The policies discussed above, though on the pattern of the normal "spoils system" of all democratic governments, had the effect of consolidating the Muslim League's hold over the administration and also of creating the image that the League was alive to the interests of Muslims. As these measures were meant for the exclusive benefit of Muslims, Hindus raised the cry of 'communal overtone' against the ministry.

One of the long-standing grievances of the Muslim community against the Hindu minority in Bengal was the question of relatively small percentage of Muslims in Government jobs. As

26. M.A.H. Ispahani, *Quid-e-Azam Jinnah, As I Knew Him* (Karachi, 1965), p. 10; Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, "*Atit Diner Smriti*" (in Bengali, Dacca, 1968), pp. 154-8.

27. Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937* (Dacca, 1972), p. 72.

28. Government of Bengal, Home-Police, File 7-M of 1936, and File 7-M (1-3) of 1937, Proceedings A 1-3 May 1940.

A number of applications for allotment of football ground were lying with the Government when the Muslim League came to power. Immediately the Secretary of the Mohammedan Sporting Club wrote a letter for allotment emphasizing that this "will remove the long-standing grievances of the Muslim community". The sanctioning officer proposed to give plot No. 41 to the Mohammedan Sporting Club and the Kalighat Club as according to the existing rules a ground had to be shared by two clubs. However, Nazimuddin interfered and ordered the allotment of enclosure 41 exclusively to the Mohammedan Sporting Club and guaranteed ability to pay Rs. 12,000/- required for the development of the plot. At that time all the European Football Clubs and Indian Football Clubs like Dalhousie Club, Rangers, East Bengal Club and Mohun Bagan Club were sharing football grounds.

early as 1885 the British Government had become conscious of this situation and called upon the local governments and High Courts to "endeavour to remove this inequality" as it felt that "the numerical inferiority of Muhammedans in the public service was very marked in Bengal".<sup>29</sup> After the annulment of partition when Muslims complained about betrayal of their interests by the British, the Government took a further step in this direction in 1914. It decided that "under the present condition one-third would be a fair share of the ministerial appointments" for Muslims in the Muslim majority districts.<sup>30</sup> Again, in 1926 the Government affirmed that one-third was the prescribed minimum and not maximum and maintained that the Government's intention in that was "to encourage education of the community and to prevent monopoly of public employment by any one class or community".<sup>31</sup>

When the Muslim League came to power the situation was still quite unsatisfactory from the Muslim point of view. Given (on page 113 top) is a statement laid before the Legislative Assembly on 29 July 1937 which would show the then existing state of things in a particular district.<sup>32</sup>

Naturally there was a demand that such a situation must be ended. Fazlul Huq's first ministry reacted favourably to this demand. However, the path was made easier by a resolution carried by the Legislative Assembly on 25 August 1938 which recommended reservation of 60 per cent of all Government appointments for Muslims. In 1939 the ministry decided that the basic percentage of reservation for Muslims in direct recruitment would be 50. In the case of jobs filled up by promotion,

29. Resolution of the Home Department dated 15 July 1885. Government of Bengal, Home Department-Appointment File 5M 1-5 of 1914.

A number of scholars are of the opinion that British official W.W. Hunter was responsible for bringing a shift in the British policy towards Muslims. However, his book which vividly portrayed the economic conditions of Muslims in lower Bengal considerably influenced the opinion of Muslim political leaders and scholars in Bengal as late as the forties.

30. Government of Bengal, Home-Appointment Order no. 3386A, dated 20 April 1914. Ibid.

31. Government of Bengal, Home Appointment File 3M-L of 1926, Proceedings 213-14, December 1926.

32. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 1937, vol. LI, no. 1, p. 30.

No. of clerks appointed by District Magistrate and Collector of Dacca	Permanent		Temporary	
	Hindus	Mussalmans	Hindus	Mussalmans
During 1936	7 (including scheduled castes)	3	12 (including scheduled castes)	7
During January 1937 to April 1937	1	Nil	No new appointment was made during January and April 1937	

the ministry decided that any excess over 50 per cent obtained by non-Muslims in the matter of promotion would be "counter-balanced by additional reservation for Muslims over and above fifty per cent in direct appointments . . . until parity is reached".<sup>33</sup> However, before this goal was realised the Government put a ban on all appointments in March 1939. Subsequently it framed the Bengal Services Recruitment Rules (Communal Ratio Rules) 1940 and a special officer, i.e. Communal Ratio Officer, was appointed to the Home (Appointment) Department to implement the decision of the Government relating to the communal ratio. In 1938, long before this decision, the Home Ministry amended the Police Recruitment Rules (Rule 833 of Police Regulation) and the amendment prescribed that "while enlisting Bengali constables the Superintendent of Police must see that not less than fifty per cent of the recruits are Muhammedans".<sup>34</sup> The 50 per cent prescribed here, it should be borne in mind, was minimum and not maximum. There were also instances where the Communal Ratio Officer called explanation from heads of departments for appointing Muslims in excess of the percentage.<sup>35</sup>

33. Government of Bengal, Home-Appointment File IE-47, Proceedings B 171-174 of 1939.

34. Government of Bengal, Home-Police File P3-1-19, Proceedings A79-81, December 1938.

35. The Publicity Department under Altaf Hussain appointed in excess of quota which was objected to by Communal Ratio Officer. Home Public File IR-46 of 1940, Proceedings 784-89, April 1941.



The Government's appointment policy was definitely bold and in keeping with the election commitment of the Muslim League members to the voters. This policy not only removed the long-standing grievance of Muslims, but also strengthened the position of the League in Bengal.

Hindus, on the other hand, felt aggrieved on this issue. They held that the big jump from 'minimum one-third' to minimum 'fifty per cent' to bring parity in Government services proved the Government's bias towards one section of the populace. The new situation resulted, according to them, because the Muslim League was in power and was following a clear communal, i.e. anti-Hindu policy to win the battle inside the legislature.<sup>36</sup> They charged that the Government sacrificed the principle of 'efficiency' and 'quality' to satisfy Muslims. The fact that in Government jobs one community was favoured to the exclusion of the other proved, they argued, that the League ministry was out to take advantage of the Muslim majority in the legislature and to consolidate Muslims on the basis of the slogan of 'service to the community', which, they felt, was introducing a dangerous dimension in the body politic of Bengal.<sup>37</sup> The ministry's policy of recruiting Muslim candidates from outside the province in order to fill up 50 per cent reservation for Muslims was cited by Hindus as conclusive evidence of the ministry's anti-Hindu mentality. While bringing an adjournment motion in the Legislative Council, Lalit Chandra Das maintained that the policy of the Government which preferred outside Muslims to non-Muslims of the province was a fine example of "communalism *par excelsis*, rather communalism ran mad".<sup>38</sup> Syed Muazzamuddin Hossain of the Muslim League went to say "that the interests of Bengali Muslims would be better served if the Muslims from outside Bengal are brought, even from outside India, probably from Egypt, if it is found necessary to do so".<sup>39</sup> While supporting the motion, the Prime Minister explained that the feeling conveyed by

36. *Ananda Bazur Patrika*, 12 July 1940.

37. *The Statesman*, 25 July 1940.

38. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. II, no. 1, 20 July 1940, p. 55.

39. Syed Muazzamuddin, *ibid.*, vol. II, no. 1, 29 July 1940, p. 69.

Hossain had not "actuated the Bengal Government to come to the decision which had been so adversely criticised by my Congress friends". He continued, "We try to recruit the best men, if the standard which we have set up is not attained by any candidate in Bengal"<sup>40</sup> and this prompted the Government to adopt this policy.

## II

The political rivalry between the Muslim League which was in power and the Congress which was in the opposition became rather sharp and manifested itself in communal bitterness. Allegations and counter-allegations were repeatedly made by members of the two parties on the floor of the legislature and in the press. This vitiated the political atmosphere in the villages too. The Government conceded that "the opposition to the Congress was conducted in the villages on communal lines".<sup>41</sup>

One result of this was that the Hindu Mahasabha was able to increase its activities in the villages and towns of Bengal and claim support among Hindus as the protector of their interests. That politics was shaping on communal lines in the interior of Bengal after the Muslim League came to power was clear from a number of incidents.

Shah Syed Gulam Sarwar Hossaini, a 'staunch supporter' of the Government, once made an allegation to the Prime Minister against the Congress workers of Noakhali.<sup>42</sup> "It is really very painful", he reported, that "the zamindars, mahajans and Hindus of Noakhali are seriously oppressing the Krishak Prajas and the leaders of the Krishak movement. They can do so very advantageously, because all the officers of all the departments of Noakhali district are Hindus." J.D.V. Hedge, Commissioner of Chittagong, on being requested by

40. Fazlul Huq, 29 July 1940, *ibid.*, vol. II, no. 1, pp. 73 and 75.

41. 'A brief summary of political events in the Presidency of Bengal during the year 1938'. Report submitted by the Government of Bengal to the Government of India.

42. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 397/37, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca.

the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal to investigate reported that it was a baseless complaint and was the result of political rivalry. "The allegations of oppression of Krishak Samity people are utterly false...the position is exactly opposite."<sup>43</sup> The affairs of Moiscal Island, Cox's Bazar, also got prominence due to the Muslim allegation that "Hindu zamindars demanded extortionate rent, took illegal exactions and the certificate procedure was so harsh that the island was increasingly depopulated."<sup>44</sup> Dr. Sannaulla, a Calcutta barrister and MLA from the Fatickhari-Haatchazari constituency, protested against these 'oppressions' in Moiscal Island and asked for 'even-handed justice'. "The facts in the island are otherwise", reported the Commissioner of Chittagong after making an investigation. He said, "This year owing to better prices the exodus to Arakan has been smaller than usual. . . ."<sup>45</sup> He informed the Government that Rai Bahadur Khirode Chandra Roy who was the only substantial Hindu zamindar in Cox's Bazar sub-division refused, during the last Assembly election, the request of the successful candidate, Khan Bahadur Jalaluddin Ahmed, to order his tenants to vote for him. Dr. Sannaulla, the Commissioner reported, "knows nothing about his constituency much less about Cox's Bazar".<sup>46</sup>

The situation in Pabna took a serious turn since the beginning of 1939 due to the increased political activities of the Congress and the Muslim League as reported by Qureshi, S.D.O., Sirajganj.<sup>47</sup> He apprehended that the tactics used by the Muslim League members might lead to untoward development and informed the District Magistrate on 19 February 1939: "I am keeping strict watch over the situation because material which the Muslim League was organising is very

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., File 300/37.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. In his D.O. letter no. 2 dated 6 January 1939 to Mahmud, District Magistrate, Pabna, he wrote: "The Congress is confining its activities to areas where Hindus predominate. Khan Saheb Osman Ghani is taking very active part in enrolling Muslims to the Muslim League". Government of Bengal, Home-Political File 87/39.

inflammatory. If there is any outward show of opposition by the Congress it is likely to have very serious results.”<sup>48</sup>

During March 1939 the Sirajganj Muslim League held a conference and a booklet *Muslim Jagarani* written by Farrukh Siar (*alias* Lutfar Rehman) was published by Maulvi Akbar Ali, its President.<sup>49</sup> He was also Vice-Chairman of the District Board. The Government considered the pamphlet as highly objectionable and proscribed it in July 1939 on the ground that it promoted “feeling of enmity and hatred between different classes of His Majesty’s subjects”.<sup>50</sup>

During April 1939 there were 16 cases of defilement of images in the Sirajganj sub-division in the course of three weeks. In many of these cases the images were damaged and were garlanded with cow bones. In a few cases slips of paper with the words “Beharer Pratisodh” written on these were tied with the pieces of bones,<sup>51</sup> which shows how the minds of Muslims were being affected by the League’s propaganda regarding Congress atrocities on Muslims in Bihar. “At Rupani there was a regular attack and assault on the Hindus by the Muham-medans”.<sup>52</sup> The assessment of the situation as made by the S.D.O., Sirajganj and the District Magistrate, Pabna, in their reports proves conclusively that “the majority of the defilement cases” were the results of “reckless and irresponsible speeches delivered by Muslim League leaders in huge gatherings attended by illiterates”.<sup>53</sup> The Hindus did not lag behind and organised

48. D.O. letter no. 9 dated 19 February 1939, *ibid*.

49. Government of Bengal, Home (Press) File 5s-17, Proceedings B-442-45, July 1939. Please see appendix II for transliterated text.

50. *Ibid*.

51. Fortnightly confidential report for the period ending 30 April 1939 submitted by S.D.O., Sirajganj to District Magistrate, Pabna. Both officials were Muslims. Government of Bengal, Home-Political File 87/39.

52. D.O. letter dated 7 May 1939 from Quereshi to Mahmud, District Magistrate, Pabna and D.O. letter 4096C dated 9 May 1939 from the District Magistrate to A. Dash, Commissioner, Rajshahi, *ibid*.

53. *Ibid*. While discussing the background and nature of the defilement cases the S.D.O. wrote further : “From previous history it is clear that the defilements are not a new thing in this area. During 1936-37 when Mr. Ishaque was the S.D.O. there were seventeen cases of image defilement. Some of the recent defilements are the result of the normal activity of a particular type committed by a section of Muslim bad characters. Second

volunteer forces on a local basis. "A disquieting feature of the whole situation is the emergence of Hindu volunteers at this stage," reported the S.D.O. "The Hindu Sabha is raising a volunteer corps to protect Hindu melas, fares, etc. It is apprehended that a communal clash might occur at any moment between the Muslim League volunteers and Hindu Sabha volunteers." This illustrates the increasing hold the Hindu Mahasabha gained over Hindus in Bengal, which further helped the Muslim League in increasing its popularity among Muslims.

### III

While the activities of the first Huq ministry resulted in considerable strengthening of the Muslim League's position, Huq's own position in the ministry went on steadily declining. Within six months of his assumption of office Huq came to feel that the stability of the ministry and his position as Prime Minister depended on the support accorded by the League and European members in the Legislature. There was also pressure from the Muslim League members of the Legislature who wanted him to justify his position as the leader of the coalition party with a minority following. His feeling after break with the Krishak Praja Party brings out his sense of utter helplessness when he said, "they have already deserted our camp and are persistently strengthening the hands of the opposition even at this juncture when all the forces are being mobilized to discredit the present cabinet."<sup>54</sup>

The budget session of 1938 was marked by 'trenchant' criticism of the ministry's tax proposals. Even a section of the coalition party, viz., its Scheduled Caste members, criticised the Government because they felt that the cause of education of Scheduled Castes did not get proper attention. It led Fazlul Huq to give the assurance that a supplementary demand for the grant of Rs. 5 lakhs for the spread of education among

cause is the personal enmity between the owner of a particular image and the person defiling it. Thirdly, there are a few cases which are the result of Hindu instigation with the object of discrediting the Muslim League movement.

54. *Star of India*, 1 September 1937.

the Scheduled Castes would be introduced in the following session.

The ministry's land revenue policy and legislation evoked maximum criticism. Tamizuddin Khan, a champion of the tenants, deserted the ministerialist coalition party on 11 March 1938. He formed the Independent Praja Party with his 17 followers. Thus out of the 36 original members who got elected on the Krishak Praja Party ticket altogether 34 (17 of the Independent Praja Party and 17 of the Krishak Praja Party-dissident) went to the opposition leaving Fazlul Huq at the mercy of the Muslim League members.

Soon there developed a major crisis in the cabinet due to differences which cropped up between Fazlul Huq and a member of his cabinet, Nausher Ali.<sup>55</sup> On the latter's refusal to resign,<sup>56</sup> Fazlul Huq submitted the ministry's resignation on 22 June 1938 and reconstituted it without Nausher Ali. The ousting of Nausher Ali, the only Muslim in the cabinet outside the Muslim League, virtually made it a Muslim League ministry, all the other Muslim members being from that organization.<sup>57</sup> The League not only became the only party in the cabinet—its Hindu members not belonging to any party—but also had the largest number and most important portfolios.

These defections, however, reduced the strength of the ministerialist coalition. With the defection of Tamizuddin Khan's group the strength of the ministerialists and that of the opposition was evenly balanced. Though the ministry still

55. The dissensions between the Ministry and Nausher Ali "had arisen from the belief entertained by the ministers that Mr. Nausher Ali was not working in harmony with them and was intriguing with the opposition." Government of India, Home-Political File 66/40.

56. While explaining his reasons for not resigning Nausher Ali said *inter alia*: "If I am not resigning it is because I want to force resignation of the other Ministers with a view to the formation of a really stable Ministry which will reflect the Assembly and the opinion in the country. As I command the confidence of the majority of House, it will, in my opinion, be a betrayal of the trust reposed in me if I resign, and it will strengthen the hands, at least for the time being, of reactionaries." *Star of India*, 23 June 1938.

57. Fazlul Huq had already joined the Muslim League in October 1937. Though he did not yet resign from the post of the President of the Krishak Praja Party, most of the party members dissociated themselves from him.

commanded the support of 127 members in the Legislature out of its total strength of 250, in case of division its fate depended on the vote of the European members who numbered 25. This insecure position of the ministry became an important factor in the parliamentary politics of Bengal during this period. Thus on 22 March 1938 when the House divided on the cut motion to the budget demand for the Medical Department, Government supporters could muster only 112 votes against 96 secured by the opposition. The fact was that European votes averted defeat of the ministry and this became a regular practice.

This was again apparent when the combined opposition of Congress and Krishak Praja Party (dissident) prepared for a trial of strength in the monsoon session of the Assembly in 1938 and tabled ten no-confidence motions against individual ministers. On 8 August when the first motion was moved by Dhananjoy Roy (Independent Scheduled Caste) against Maharaj Sris Chandra Nandy of Cossimbazar, it was defeated by 130 to 111 votes. The votes cast in favour of the Government included 92 coalition members, 23 European members, 9 Scheduled Caste members, 4 members of the Nationalist Party and 2 Anglo-Indian members. The 111 opposition votes included 53 Congress, 18 Krishak Praja Party, 15 Independent Scheduled Caste Party, 14 Independent Praja Party (Tamizuddin Khan group), 5 Nationalist Party, 2 Independent Labour Party, 2 Independent Christians, one Anglo-Indian and one representative of tea garden labour. Maulvi Abdul Hakim of the Krishak Praja Party and Kassem Ali Mirza and Mahmood Ibrahim of the Independent Praja Party remained neutral. It is evident that but for the support of the European group (23 members), the cabinet would have definitely lost in this crucial voting and been ousted from power.

The sequel, however, did not add to the strength of the combined Krishak Praja Party and Congress opposition. Calcutta experienced unprecedented excitement over the issue and the Muslim opinion was so strongly in favour of the ministry and the League that many of the Krishak Praja Party legislators had to spend the night preceding the division in the Assembly Chamber. The Bengal Provincial Muslim League and the Khilafat Committee (Suhrawardy was Secretary to both

these organizations) organized a big demonstration of one lakh of people near the Assembly House on 8 August 1938 and ordered *hartal* on 8 and 9 August in support of the ministry. The motion of no-confidence was in several ways a "blessing in disguise" for the ministry as it not only removed the discord among the ministers but also moulded Muslim public opinion in their favour. A section of progressive Muslims felt that although the Huq ministry had failed on many scores, it was the best in the circumstances.<sup>58</sup> They also felt that any ministry which was not under Fazlul Huq's leadership would not be sympathetic to Muslim interests and that the Muslim opposition (meaning the Krishak Praja Party) had pointed "a gun" at the ministry instead of "whipping it for its failure".<sup>59</sup>

Both *Star of India* and *Azad*, spokesmen of the Muslim League, waged a crusade against this 'Hindu attempt' to break the Muslim ministry since July 1938.<sup>60</sup> Hindus, these papers pointed out, worked for the downfall of the ministry because Muslims were in power. *Azad* went to the extent of reminding Muslims that it was a Hindu conspiracy which had brought an end to Muslim rule in Bengal on the battleground of Plassey and now the same conspiracy sought to end the Muslim ministry in the province and establish "Hindu raj".<sup>61</sup>

The failure of no-confidence motions demoralised the opposition also. Fazlul Huq quickly moved to take advantage of it including in his ministry Tamizuddin Khan and Shamsuddin Ahmed, leaders of the Independent Praja Party and the Krishak Praja Party, respectively, in November 1938. He promised to fulfil the demands included in the programme of the Krishak Praja Party. His main intention was, of course, to wean the Krishak Praja Party away from the Congress. Shamsuddin resigned on 17 February 1939 on the ground that Fazlul Huq did not fulfil the promises given to the Krishak Praja Party. However, by that time the damage had been done by splitting the Krishak Praja Party opposition to the detriment of the Congress.

58. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachhar* (Dacca, 1970), edn. 2, pp. 172-3.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Star of India*, 20, 26, 27 July 1938; *Azad*, 30 July, 7 August 1938.

61. *Azad*, 3 August 1938.



Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Minister for Finance, resigned in December 1939 as he disagreed with the official war resolution, which invested "a minority with the power to veto all proposals for political advancement".<sup>62</sup> Suhrawardy was then given the additional charge of finance. Fazlul Huq's speech on the war resolution illustrated beyond doubt the extent to which he identified himself with ideas of the All-India Muslim League and its leader Jinnah. "I say most emphatically", he declared, "that if any such contingency arises and if the minorities do not accept a constitution . . . which the minorities do not consider sufficient for their protection, in that case the political progress of the country must be held up till the majority recognizes its duties to the minorities".<sup>63</sup>

This transformation, Jinnah's greatest achievement before the Lahore Resolution, was the result of the Bengal legislative politics, conditioned by the attitude of the Congress and the Krishak Praja Party towards the ministry. Fazlul Huq realised that in order to save his ministry he needed the support of an all-India organization. And he could not do so without joining the mainstream of the Indian Muslim minority. This had the effect of strengthening the Muslim League in Bengal. The party in its turn strengthened the ministry during 1937-41 by rallying behind it the support of the Muslim masses.

#### IV

A sequel of the League forming the ministry in Bengal was that the MLAs came to the helm of affairs in the party. To keep the provincial League under his control Jinnah, at the Lucknow session of the All India Muslim League (October 1937), appointed a committee consisting of twenty members to organize provincial, district and primary branches of the League in Bengal.<sup>64</sup> Thereafter, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League

62. Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, 18 December 1939, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LV, no. 3, p. 227.

63. Fazlul Huq, *ibid.*, p. 251.

64. The important members of the Bengal Committee were Fazlul Huq, Nazimuddin, Shahabuddin, Ispahani brothers, Syed Badruddoja. *Star of India*, 26 October 1937.

was formed in 1937, with Fazlul Huq as President and Suhrawardy as Secretary (see Appendix III for full list of the Provincial set up). By this time Fazlul Huq had broken away from the important section of the Krishak Praja Party and as a result had very few followers in the League. The League in Bengal, thus, was formed of only pro-Jinnah elements and Fazlul Huq was made the figure head. This set-up continued till 1941, when Fazlul Huq broke away from the League and formed the Progressive Muslim League.

Since the Congress in Bengal was involved in a trial of strength with the ministry, the League's main activities in the beginning were confined to organizing demonstrations and processions in support of the ministry. An All Bengal Muslim Conference by the League was organized in late October 1937 in Behrampur, Murshidabad, which was presided over by Jinnah. His coming over to Bengal considerably increased the prestige of the League MLAs in the eyes of ordinary Muslims and strengthened the organization.

The Muslim League MLAs not only supported the ministry in the legislature but also started setting up branches of the League at district and thana levels. This was mainly in response to the challenges of the Congress and the Krishak Praja Party which increased their activities among peasants. For as a government report indicated, although the Congress moves were thwarted in the legislature, outside "Congress activity showed a marked increase".<sup>65</sup> The most striking feature of this activity was extension of Congress propaganda to peasants, labour and students, and efforts to capture local bodies. Every endeavour was made to increase the number of Congress members in rural areas and to secure control of municipalities, and district, local, and union boards. These efforts of the Congress, in which the Krishak Praja Party also joined, led to the growth of a "no rent mentality in different parts of Bengal".<sup>66</sup> Thus in January 1940 "agitation against the enhancement of rent was reported from Contai. Krishak Samitis were fomenting trouble with zamindars in various parts of the Rajshahi Division and a Congress-Krishak coalition was disputing with Muslim League

65. Government of India, Home-Political File F 66/40 of 1940.

66. Ibid.

the control of the peasants in Tippera".<sup>67</sup> In Jessore District there were a number of Krishak meetings and Nausher Ali, ex-minister, took to active Krishak agitation and government was on the look-out to find some ground to arrest him.<sup>68</sup>

In the meanwhile, Congress efforts to remove the League-dominated ministry continued. Besides the 'no-confidence' motion of August 1938, several attempts were made during 1938-39 to replace it with a Congress-supported ministry. At the Calcutta session of the All India Muslim League in April 1938 Fazlul Huq declared: "The Congress has, during recent months, again and again made overtures to me offering me the premiership in a Congress coalition cabinet in Bengal".<sup>69</sup> In the district political conference held in Malda in 1939 Subhas Bose was said to have "considered taking over the Government of Bengal as a first step as he foreshadowed an early Congress ministry in the province".<sup>70</sup>

To face these challenges the Muslim League naturally organized local branches of the party. While the Congress was a well-knit organization with branches spreading all over Bengal which provided the Krishak Praja Party also a platform for its activities, the Muslim League depended on the feeling of Islamic solidarity and government patronage to extend its influence. The stock-in-trade in the anti-Hindu propaganda followed by the Muslim League was the "oppression on Muslims in Bihar" by the Congress Government.<sup>71</sup>

By 1939 Muslim League branches were established at all the sub-divisional towns of Pabna, Noakhali and many places of Chittagong, Dacca and Faridpur. In Pabna there were as many as eight Muslim League branches in one police station, named Chauhali. Besides, the MLAs established Muslim League branches in their constituencies and the Rural Reconstruction

67. Ibid.

68. Government of Bengal, Fortnightly Report ending 10 May 1939 from Commissioner, Presidency Division. Home-Political File 266/39, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca.

69. *Star of India*, 18 April 1938.

70. Summary compiled by Government of Bengal of political events in the Province during 1939. Government of Bengal, Home-Political File 12 P-40 of 1940 (Confidential) June 1941.

71. Government of India, Home-Political File 66/1940.

Committee with the grants at its disposal provided a good incentive to committed workers. All this contributed to the phenomenal increase of Muslim League organizations in different parts of Bengal during this period.

It is not, therefore, surprising that at the Lahore session of the Muslim League (March 1940) which adopted the famous Pakistan resolution, nearly 400 delegates and visitors from Bengal joined.<sup>72</sup> The credit for this representation from Bengal goes entirely to Suhrawardy, Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, whose wonderful organizing capacity made the Bengal Provincial Muslim League an active and well-organized body in Calcutta. But Fazlul Huq got the prime appreciation when Jinnah made him introduce the Muslim League resolution on the constitution, later known as the Lahore Resolution. That it was merely a tactical move on the part of Jinnah, and did not indicate the real nature of relationship between the two leaders, soon became clear when differences between them came into the open. To them we now turn.

72. Muhammad Waliullah, *Yug Bichitra* (in Bengali, Dacca, 1967), p. 378.

## CHAPTER V

### SPLIT IN THE MUSLIM LEAGUE AND FAZLUL HUQ'S SECOND MINISTRY 1941-43

As the Muslim League developed a mass base in Bengal, Jinnah's control over it also grew. Within Bengal itself the three leading persons in the League were Fazlul Huq, Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy. Suhrawardy's base was largely confined to Calcutta. He had established his leadership over the Muslim population in Calcutta (barring a few educated) through his activities as Secretary of the Khilafat Committee. His leadership struggle with Fazlul Huq, who was the accepted leader of Muslims of Bengal outside Calcutta, pushed Suhrawardy towards the side of Nazimuddin and made him a willing partner in the group of pro-Jinnah elements in Bengal Muslim politics. This provided Jinnah with an easy hold over Muslim League politics in Bengal—both its parliamentary party and provincial organization. But though Jinnah utilised Suhrawardy against Fazlul Huq, he kept him out of any position of influence in the All India Muslim League. The three members of the Working Committee of the All India Muslim League from Bengal were Fazlul Huq, Nazimuddin and A.R. Siddique. When Siddique resigned in December 1939 owing to differences on the question of observing the 'Deliverance Day,' Akram Khan was nominated to the Working Committee.

Jinnah's hold on the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and its parliamentary wing was clear when he made Shahabuddin the Chief Whip of the League Parliamentary Party overriding the better claims of a number of other parliamentarians. The outbreak of war afforded Jinnah an opportunity to further consolidate his control over the provincial League. When the Congress ministries resigned in 1939 Jinnah asked Muslims to observe a 'Day of Deliverance' on 22 December 1939 as a sign

of relief from "Congress oppression". This did not go unchallenged in Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

In June 1940 when Sikandar Hayat Khan fell out with Jinnah on the question of joining the war committees, Fazlul Huq lent him support.<sup>2</sup> In spite of Jinnah's formal warning,<sup>3</sup> the two Premiers held talks with Congress leaders in Delhi on 9 July 1940 on the question of solving the communal problem. Before this Fazlul Huq said in a press statement: "The need of the country demands that India must not miss the bus, and I am using all my influence to bring about unity and create a united front."<sup>4</sup> Speaking on a resolution on the future constitution of India to be framed by a constituent assembly, Fazlul Huq declared in the Bengal Assembly on 2 August 1940 that he "was not opposed to a constituent assembly as such" but what he wanted was that before they met in a constituent assembly the framework of the constitution should be discussed

1. There was an open challenge to this from a section of Muslim Leaguers in Bengal. Abdur Rahman Siddique resigned his membership of the All-India Muslim League Working Committee, criticizing this decision of Jinnah as "an insult to national prestige" and as "flattery of British Imperialism". The basis of the policy of Jinnah and the All-India Muslim League since the inauguration of provincial autonomy was opposition to the Congress and Congress ministries. The policy of the All-India Muslim League leadership appeared reactionary to many of the Muslim League leaders in Bengal. Muhammad Waliullah, *Amader Mukti-Sangram* (Dacca, 1969) p. 331.

2. The All-India Muslim League Working Committee at its meeting on 15 June 1940 at Bombay passed a resolution barring Muslims from joining war committees which prompted Sikandar Hayat Khan to issue a statement on 18 June 1940 that this provision did not apply to the Punjab and Bengal. On 19 June Jinnah issued a rejoinder to Sikandar Hayat Khan describing his remark as "childish". Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachhar* (Dacca, 1970), edn. 2, p. 218.

3. The Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League passed a resolution at its meeting on 15-16 June 1940 at Bombay that "no member of Working Committee of the Muslim League should enter into any negotiations or discussions with the Congress leaders regarding the question of Hindu-Muslim settlement or any other matters which require adjustment between the Muslim League and the Congress without the permission of the President."

4. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 16 June 1940.

and settled among different communities<sup>5</sup>. When students of Calcutta started the movement for removal of the Holwell monument, Fazlul Huq gave an undertaking that it would be removed even at the risk of displeasing his European supporters and despite the warnings of some of the League leaders.<sup>6</sup> He persuaded the Governor to hold a conference of representatives of different parties on 10 March 1941 to discuss the problems facing the province in spite of opposition of Muslim leaders of the coalition party.<sup>7</sup> This was preceded by his meeting with some Hindu leaders at Town Hall on 6 March 1941.

In July 1941 all the three Muslim Premiers of Assam, Bengal and the Punjab were invited by the Viceroy to join the National Defence Council. This they did. Jinnah, however, took exception to it as he was not consulted, and issued a statement stressing the need for taking disciplinary action.<sup>8</sup> The Working Committee of the League at its meeting on 25 August 1941 asked Fazlul Huq to resign within 10 days. He retorted by resigning from the All-India Muslim League as also from the National Defence Council. The letter he wrote

5. Fazlul Huq, 2 August 1940, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LVII, no. 3, p. 91.

6. In July 1940 the students of Calcutta, particularly Muslim students, started a movement under the leadership of Subhas Bose observing 3 July 1940 as Sirajuddoulla Day thus projecting the Nawab as the last symbol of Bengali nationalism. *Morning News*, 2, 5, July 1940; *Azad*, 10, July 1940.

7. The report runs as follows: "The members of the coalition party do not like the idea of the conference as they hold that there can be no compromise with the Hindus on the questions of Census, the Secondary Education Bill and the Calcutta Municipal Amendment Bill. Mr. Huq had assured them that he would be completely adamant about the first two issues but did not say anything as to the third. This made the coalition party members suspicious that he may have already committed himself to some other groups on this issue. They, however, do not intend to press the matter too far at this stage but would raise it later." Government of India, File 241/41-Poll (I): Reports of the Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta.

8. It was felt in Muslim League circles in Bengal (other than the pro-Jinnah elements) that Jinnah indulged in this trial of strength with the British Government as a retaliation for the Viceroy's refusal to allow the Muslim League to form government after the Congress ministries resigned. Muhammad Waliullah, *Yug Bichitra* (Dacca, 1967), p. 385.

on this occasion to the League Secretary on 8 September 1941 is a historic document.<sup>9</sup> In that letter he made serious allegation against Jinnah and minority domination of the politics of the All-India Muslim League which he felt was detrimental to the interests of Muslims in Bengal "who occupy the key position in Muslim India".

Fazlul Huq challenged Jinnah at a time when Jinnah indulged in a show of authority over all the provincial branches in a bid to demonstrate to the British Government his absolute hold over Muslim politics. It seemed that a showdown between the two leaders was imminent. Even the British Government was not sure about the future. The Central Intelligence Officer reported from Calcutta :

Secret information also indicates that Mr. Huq is now determined to have matters out with Mr. Jinnah and he is taking steps to gain support for a reconstituted ministry in Bengal by forming alliance with opposition parties to replace those Muslims who continue their attachment to the League, in case he severs his connection from the League.<sup>10</sup>

For the time being, however, the crisis blew over. Fazlul Huq made up with the All-India Muslim League leadership and wrote a letter of apology to Liaquat Ali Khan on 14 November 1941,<sup>11</sup> and the League Working Committee treated the matter as closed.<sup>12</sup>

9. Government of India, Home Political File 17/4/41-Poll (I). Please see Appendix IV for full text of the letter.

10. Government of India, Home Political File 17/4/41-Poll (I) : Report from the Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, for the 2nd half of August 1941.

11. The letter ended as follows : "It is irony of fate that of all who have given of their best to build up only national organisation of Muslim India, I should have been object of so much misunderstanding and uninformed criticism. It appears that portions of my letter have hurt feelings of President and some other friends. I convey to them assurances that nothing was further from my intention than to hurt feelings of or cast aspersions on any one and I hope these assurances will be accepted and matter considered as closed." Ibid.

12. Jinnah's challenge of British Government and his attempt to throw out the three Premiers because of their support of war efforts raised a big



But the matter did not end there. It seemed that Fazlul Huq made up with the All-India Muslim League leadership as he needed a breathing spell. His relations with other League leaders in Bengal had already become considerably strained. While reporting on the developments inside the Bengal Muslim League during the second half of August 1941 the Central Intelligence Officer wrote :

As a symptom of friction which has developed between Mr. Fazlul Huq and the other Muslim League members it is reported that some of Huq's followers have started a campaign of criticism of the Muslim paper *Azad*, the editor of which is Akram Khan, the Vice-President of Bengal Provincial Muslim League. A few members of this group who attempted to hold a meeting to criticise the paper *Azad* were dispersed by some of the members of the Muslim League who then held a meeting expressing confidence in Mr. Jinnah and endorsing the policy of the paper *Azad*.<sup>13</sup>

Fazlul Huq had already decided to come out of the Muslim League with his followers. With this in mind he started a paper *Navayug*.<sup>14</sup> The Muslim League leaders were also not under any illusion. In order to build up public opinion against Fazlul Huq and to win the leadership race Suhrawardy organized a big meeting in Calcutta Maidan on 11 September 1941 to condemn certain remarks of Fazlul Huq against the League President in his letter dated 8 September 1941.<sup>15</sup> Fazlul Huq retorted by issuing a press statement on question before the Muslim League leaders all over India. There was pressure on Jinnah to take a lenient view and this resulted in the compromise between Fazlul Huq and Jinnah by the middle of November 1941.

13. Report from the Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, for the 2nd half of August 1941. Government of India, Home Political File 17/4/41-Poll. (I).

14. Ahmad, n. 3, pp. 216-19. He was the editor of the paper. Though the arrangement for its publication was going on for some time, it was first published in August 1941.

15. Fazlul Huq to Liaquat Ali Khan, Secretary, All India Muslim League, dated 8 September 1941. Fazlul Huq gave this letter to the press and almost all the Hindu dailies on 10 September carried important excerpts from the letter. See n. 9.

12 September saying : "The genius of the Bengali race revolts against autocracy and I could not, therefore, help protesting against the autocracy of a single individual when I discussed the political situation in my letter to the Secretary of All India Muslim League."<sup>16</sup>

Followers of Fazlul Huq carried the struggle inside the legislature and after having a talk with the Hindu opposition tabled a no-confidence motion against Suhrawardy on 16 September 1941. Suhrawardy was saved by the Deputy Speaker who abruptly adjourned the House on that day.<sup>17</sup> By the time it met for its winter session on 27 November, supporters of Fazlul Huq seceded from the ministerial coalition party and formed themselves into the Progressive Assembly Party which included 47 members of the coalition party. They also tried to seek new alliances in order to have a stable ministry.<sup>18</sup> On 29 November they tabled two no-confidence motions against Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy. The European group tried hard to effect a compromise between Fazlul Huq and Nazimuddin. Suhrawardy also felt the need to patch up the differences. But things had proceeded too far for such efforts to succeed. In such a situation the League members, who were in a majority in the cabinet, had no illusion about the result of the motions of 'no-confidence' and resigned on 1 December 1941 hoping that if the dissolution of the cabinet followed their resignations the Governor would find himself free to call on one of them to constitute a cabinet which he could not have done had the legislature expressed its want of confidence in them by a majority of votes. During the cabinet meeting on that crucial date the League members wanted it out with Fazlul Huq and were not prepared to give him any more time to patch up the differences.<sup>19</sup> When the majority of the League ministers resigned, Fazlul Huq had to tender the resignation of the ministry.

16. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 September 1941.

17. As per schedule the session came to an end on 18 September and the winter session started on 27 November 1941.

18. *Star of India*, 5 December 1941.

19. Ispahani to Jinnah dated 1 December 1941. M.A.H. Ispahani, *Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah As I Knew Him* (Karachi, 1967), edn. 2, p. 46.

These events are best described in a letter sent the same day by M.A.H. Ispahani to Jinnah:

A meeting of the Cabinet was held today. Huq got the ball rolling. He said he was doing everything in his power to patch up the differences and that he had partly succeeded in his efforts. He wanted more time to complete his job. Our representatives laughed. It was a joke that they heard all before. They replied, "It is out of question". He then threatened that there was just one alternative and that was resignation of the Cabinet. Our fellows jumped to it and said, "Yes, we agree—we cannot continue in this fashion". All wrote out their resignations and handed them to the Governor. These have not been accepted so far but it is definite that they will be. The chances are that we will be called upon to constitute the new government. Let us see.<sup>20</sup>

The subsequent events turned out to be different. The Progressive Assembly Party, which effected a successful *entente* between Fazlul Huq, Sarat Bose and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, converted itself into the Progressive Coalition Party on 28 November 1941. It included, besides 47 members of the ministerialist coalition, 19 members of the Krishak Praja Party, 27 of the Forward Bloc, 12 Independent Scheduled Caste members and 11 Hindu Mahasabha members. It was even assured of responsive co-operation by the 28 members of the official Congress. Fazlul Huq accepted leadership of this group on 3 December 1941. "The formation of this party", Fazlul Huq announced, "bringing together as it does the diverse elements in India's national life, is an event unprecedented in the history of India and should, I hope, be an augury not only for the cessation of communal strife, but also for the carrying out of a programme for the good of all sections of the people in this country." The Governor, however, did not call upon Fazlul Huq to form a ministry till 11 December

20. Ibid.

1941,<sup>21</sup> and that very morning Sarat Bose was arrested by the Government of India under the Defence of India Rules and sent out of Bengal.<sup>22</sup>

In the meanwhile, the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League at a meeting on 2 December asked the Muslim League members of the legislature to dissociate themselves from the Progressive Coalition Party and a new Muslim League Legislature Party was formed. The Muslim League ministers issued a statement on 5 December 1941 condemning Fazlul Huq for betraying the Muslim League :

All were aware that Mr. Huq has been off and on, during last two years, if not longer, in secret consultation with Mr. Sarat Bose, the leader of the Congress Forward Bloc, and certain Hindu Mahasabha leaders for the formation of an alternative Ministry . . . . In the interest of Muslim solidarity . . . we put up with all these and many such attempts. Matters, however, came to a crisis when Huq wrote a letter to the Secretary of All India Muslim League, casting aspersions on Mr. Jinnah and attempting to create a serious division in Muslim ranks by raising the Bengali and non-Bengali question in relation to All India politics and threatening to dissociate the Muslims of Bengal from All India Muslim League.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, Jinnah expelled Fazlul Huq from the League "for his treacherous betrayal of the League organization and the

21. Government of India, Home Political File 232/41-Poll. (I). The letter dated 14 December 1941 from Nazimuddin to Jinnah gives an interesting account of what happened behind the curtain, see Appendix V.

22. The Government was not in favour of combination of Fazlul Huq with Sarat Bose. "Mr. Fazlul Huq has been approaching Sarat Bose and other members of the opposition and assessing the support which he might expect in the event of a break with the other League Ministers", reported the Central Intelligence Officer from Calcutta. "The obvious flaw in this arrangement is acceptance of support from Sarat Bose which would place the leader of the Fifth Column in the Government of the Province." Government of India, Home Political File 17/4/41-Poll. (I).

23. *Star of India*, 5 December 1941.

Mussalmans generally". This was approved by the Working Committee meeting of the All-India Muslim League at Nagpur on 26 December 1941.<sup>24</sup>

The split in the Muslim League in Bengal was now complete. Although growing tension in the ranks of the Muslim League leadership had made a significant contribution to this split, the main factor behind it was the rift between Jinnah, representing the all-India leadership of the League, on the one hand, and Fazlul Huq, who looked upon himself as the custodian of Bengal Muslims' interests, on the other. As noticed in the previous chapter, the latter had joined the League under certain compulsions and not out of conviction that he would be able to serve his community's interests better by doing so. It seems true that he had a strong desire to come to power, but he sincerely believed that to serve the cause of the toiling masses in Bengal the progressive sections among Bengalis should combine against vested interests.<sup>25</sup> His experience during the years 1937-41 with the Muslim League made him feel that the policies followed by the League leadership in all India politics would go against Muslim interests in Bengal.

Jinnah for his part depended on the urban-based leadership in the Bengal Muslim League represented by Ispahani, Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy as he realized the potential danger in projecting a provincial mass Muslim leader who could pose a challenge to the domination of the League's national leadership based largely on Muslim minority provinces. The unquestioning commitment of these sections to policies of the League's national leadership spelt danger for Bengali Muslims. Within a few months of his introducing the Lahore Resolution in March 1940, Fazlul Huq was speaking in terms of harmonious and even growth of Hindus as well as Muslims for the good of Bengal,<sup>26</sup> because he felt that uneven growth of the two communities was at the root of all disagreement and bitterness between

24. *Resolutions of the All India Muslim League from April 1941 to April 1942* (Delhi, n.d.), p. 39.

25. Amalendu Dey, *Pakistan Prastab O Fazlul Huq* (Calcutta, 1972), p. 34.

26. Fazlul Huq's speech to Muslim students of Islamia College on the question of removal of Holwell monument and on the occasion of "Sirajoddauila Day". *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 23 July 1940. See also his

them which the reactionary parties were taking advantage of.<sup>27</sup> Secondly, while he introduced the Lahore resolution and 'never spoke against the idea of Pakistan' in public, he also categorically emphasized the need to protect the rights of Bengali Muslims. In his letter to the *Statesman* (Calcutta), he bluntly said:

We depend upon Quaid-i-Azam to modify the Pakistan idea so as to enable Muslims of Bengal also to assert their self-determination along with Muslims of other provinces and also members of other communities in all the provinces.<sup>28</sup>

He was the first to point out the pernicious effect of partition of Bengal on Bengali Muslims.<sup>29</sup> The following quotation from the above letter brings out his feelings fully:

I want to make one comment regarding recent utterances about this (Pakistan) scheme. Let me quote from the resolution itself: "Resolved that it is the considered view of this session of the All-India Muslim League that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North Western and Eastern Zones of India should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign". We have to remember that the provinces geographically adjacent to Bengal are Assam, Bihar and Orissa. In Assam the Muslims are only 35%, in Bihar 10% and in Orissa barely 4%.

speech in the Assembly on 27 February 1944. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LXVII, no. 2, pp. 43-54; A.K. Fazlul Huq, *Bengal Today* (Calcutta, 1944), pp. 42-50.

27. Dey, n. 25, p. 34.

28. Fazlul Huq's letter to the *Statesman* (Calcutta), dated 2 February 1943.

29. Speech delivered by Fazlul Huq at the Hindu-Muslim Unity Conference on 20 June 1942. *Hindustani Standard*, 21 June 1942. See also Dey, n. 25, p. 135.

It is, therefore, evident that Bengal, as constituted cannot form an autonomous state with the geographically adjacent provinces. If, however, Bengal has got to be divided into two, the result will be that the Eastern Zone which will be a predominantly Muslim area will be surrounded by 4 provinces in which Hindus will be in a majority. It is therefore no use hoodwinking Muslims of Bengal that the formula which may hold good in the Punjab will also hold good in Bengal. At the same time Bengal Muslims must realize that they have got to fall into line with the rest of India.

These feelings were expressed cogently, yet strongly, in his famous letter dated 8 September 1941 to Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, Secretary, All-India Muslim League, which bears extensive quotation:

I protest emphatically against the manner in which Bengal and Punjab Muslim interests are being imperilled by Muslim leaders of 'minority provinces'. Muslim brethren in minority provinces can never hope to enjoy effective voice in administration let alone power. They cannot imagine advantages of dominant position of Muslim community in administration of Bengal and Punjab. They neither realise responsibilities of Muslim Premiers of these Provinces nor care for repercussions on politics of Bengal and Punjab Muslims of their decision of Muslim India as a whole. They should not meddle too much with politics of majority provinces. At present I feel Bengal does not count much in counsels of political leaders outside province though we constitute more than one third of total Muslim population of India. . . . I confidently hope that political dictators in future will act with greater foresight so as to prevent creation of situation from which escape can be effected only by course of action which is revolting to sound sense or even conscience.<sup>30</sup>

30. See n. 9 and also Appendix IV.

## II

The strength of the Progressive Coalition headed by Fazlul Huq consisted of Progressive Assembly Party—42, Congress Bose Group—28, Krishak Praja Party—19, Hindu Mahasabha—14, Independent Scheduled Caste Group—12, Anglo-Indians—3, Labour—1. The 42 members of the Progressive Assembly Party were the seceders from the Muslim League, including the original members of the Krishak Praja Party who remained with Fazlul Huq in the Muslim League in 1937.

The official Congress consisting of 25 members with Kiran Shanker Roy, as the leader, promised responsive co-operation. The Muslim League with 43 members sat in the opposition under the leadership of Nazimuddin who became the leader of the opposition. The 25 European members were generally thought to be sympathetic to the Muslim League though their official line was not one of opposition to the Government. There were another 25 uncommitted members who swung between the government supporters and the opposition. Instead of a marginal majority of the previous coalition ministry, the new coalition commanded a comfortable majority and did not have to lean on the votes of European members.<sup>31</sup>

The technique and the strategy of legislative politics of the Muslim League centered round one thing, i.e. how to dislodge the Fazlul Huq ministry<sup>32</sup> and instal once more a Muslim League ministry. The Muslim League Parliamentary Party was careful not to let away a single opportunity to discredit the ministry. The European group, though nominally committed to support the ministry, joined this tirade of the Muslim League.

The important issues which came before the legislature during 1942-March 1943 were: (a) The policy to be adopted towards the Congress, (b) food shortage, and (c) police firing inside a mosque at Kishoreganj.

The decision to start the 'Quit India' movement was taken by the AICC on 8 August 1942. In the wake of this decision a great revolutionary upheaval started all over India. Jinnah

31. The figures worked out on the basis of the voting pattern in the Legislature on different issues during the year 1942.

32. Fazlul Huq's second ministry was formed on 11 December 1941.



asked Muslims 'to abstain from any participation in the movement' and 'to continue to pursue their normal peaceful life'. He declared that "the movement was inimical to Muslim interests because it had been launched to force the Government's hands to surrender to the Congress and concede their demands, which meant a death-blow to Muslim interests."<sup>33</sup> The League Working Committee adopted a resolution defining its attitude towards the movement and containing instructions to be followed by Muslims. It deplored the decision of the Congress to launch an 'open-rebellion' by resorting to mass civil disobedience. The resolution said:

Ever since the beginning of the war and even prior to that the sole object of the Congress policy has been either to cajole or coerce the British Government into surrendering power to the Congress . . . . While claiming the right of self-determination for 'India' which is a mere Congress euphemism for Hindu majority, it has persistently opposed the right of self-determination for the Muslim nation to decide and determine their own destiny.

The resolution went on to declare that the 'Quit India' slogan "is a mere camouflage and what is really aimed at is the supreme control of the Government of the country by the Congress".<sup>34</sup>

While some important Muslim League leaders protested against this attitude of the All India Muslim League<sup>35</sup> towards

33. *Star of India*, 19 August 1942: Jinnah's speech to the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League.

34. *Resolutions of the All India Muslim League from April 1942 to May 1943* (Delhi, n. d.), p. 10.

35. Syed Mohammad Hussain, Secretary of the Muslim League Party in the Council of State, issued a statement on 29 August 1942 saying that the decision reached at Bombay "has failed to give any lead to the Muslim at a juncture when it was so urgently needed." *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 31 August 1942.

Syed Abdul Latif said at Hyderabad: "Every sincere well-wisher of the Muslim League will deeply regret the resolution adopted by its Working Committee in Bombay." *Indian Annual Register*, 1942, vol. II, July-December, p. 22.

the 'Quit India' movement, the Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Party and the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League welcomed the resolution. The latter asked Muslims in Bengal to follow the resolution in all its implications and guide themselves *vis-a-vis* the movement initiated by the Congress in accordance with the instructions contained in it.<sup>36</sup>

Fazlul Huq's anxiety about the Congress movement could be seen from the telegram he sent to the Viceroy for onward transmission to Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin saying that "the permanent interests of world peace and freedom require immediate settlement with India".<sup>37</sup> In the Bengal Assembly he was put in a dilemma. The Congress revolted against the government which he was leading. The Muslim League immediately demanded a categorical statement from him condemning the Congress movement. The European members, to whom the August 1942 movement meant recrudescence of the terrorist activities, joined the Muslim League demand and asked for a statement on the policy of the ministry towards it.

In September 1942 the leader of the European group in the Assembly introduced a resolution supporting the measures adopted by the Government to suppress the movement. Syed Badrudduja, a member of the Progressive Coalition, tried to introduce an amendment to the resolution, but his voice was drowned by uproar created by the Muslim League and the European members. They opposed the amendment and demanded the ministry's definite commitment to the repressive policy.

Fazlul Huq was in no mood to condemn the movement nor could he support the repressive policy whole-heartedly. The support of a section of the Congress was a built-in-necessity in the existing situation. He could not also go back on his declared policy of whole-hearted support to the British during the war; he also knew that if he did anything like that he could not continue in office. These were the constraints which only

36. Resolution passed at the Working Committee meeting of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League on 28 August 1942 at Calcutta. *Star of India*, 28 August 1942.

37. *Amrita Bazar Parika*, 20 August 1942.

strengthened efforts of the opposition to discredit him and his ministry. His speech in the Assembly on the occasion showed that he had perforce to speak in defence of the administration.<sup>38</sup>

When all sections in the Assembly demanded an open and independent judicial enquiry into instances of repression in Tamluk and Contai Subdivisions in Midnapore in the wake of the Quit India movement he promptly conceded this.<sup>39</sup> This displeased the Governor who asked Fazlul Huq for an explanation of his "conduct in failing to consult me before announcing what purports to be the decision of the Government". He went on to add: "this subject attracts my special responsibilities and you are also well aware of my views on the undesirability of enquiries in this matter".<sup>40</sup> Fazlul Huq's reply to the Governor dated 16 February 1943 is illustrative of the difficulties he was facing in relation to the Governor, his own survival being at stake. The letter said:

In reply to your letter of the 15 Feb. 1943, I write to say that I owe you no explanation whatever in respect of my 'conduct', in failing to consult you before announcing what according to you is the decision of the Government; but I certainly owe you a duty to administer a mild warning that indecorous languages such as has been used in your letter under reply should, in future, be avoided in any correspondence between the Governor and his Chief Minister.

. . . if your feelings have been that no enquiry should be instituted it was your clear duty to send for me and tell me that whatever the demand may be and from whatever side it may be, I was to have told the House that you were opposed to such an enquiry and therefore no enquiry can be promised by the Government . . . You neglected your duty in not sending for me and now you accuse me that in the House I gave an unauthoritative decision of the Government. When I was in the House,

38. Fazlul Huq's speech on the floor of Assembly, 15 September 1942, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LXIII, no. 1, p. 44.

39. Fazlul Huq, 15 February 1943, *ibid.*, vol. LXIV, no. 1, p. 98.

40. Sir J.A. Herbert to Chief Minister, dated 15 February 1943.

I found that not only were the most serious charges brought by responsible members of the House, but the demand for enquiry was not opposed by a single member. Even the European group kept silent and the opposition were loudest in condemning us for not having made enquiries long before. In the circumstances it was impossible to resist the demand for the enquiry that had been made.<sup>41</sup>

This is one of a series of instances of Fazlul Huq's friction with the Governor and not long after that he was removed from Premiership by the Governor which would be discussed later on.

In the extremely difficult situation Fazlul Huq was embarrassed not a little by his supporters and colleagues. Before Shyama Prasad Mukherjee resigned on 20 November 1942, there were allegations in the nationalist press that the Prime Minister was reduced to the position of a non-entity and that the administration in Bengal was being carried on in an autocratic fashion by the Governor and officials of the permanent services over the head and in most cases behind the back of the ministers.<sup>42</sup> After resigning from the cabinet on the issue of repression Shyama Prasad issued a press statement categorically stating

... that ministers, while possessing great responsibilities for which they are answerable to the people and the legislature, have very little powers, especially in matters concerning the rights and liberties of the people. The Governor has chosen to act, in many vital matters, in disregard of the wishes of the ministers and has depended on the advice of a section of permanent officials, who are indifferent to the interests of the province.<sup>43</sup>

41. Fazlul Huq's statement "Why I resigned" on the floor of the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 5 July 1943. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LXV, no. nil, pp. 39-63. This statement and other statement on 27 February 1944 have been reprinted in a book. Huq, n. 26. See also *Indian Annual Register*, 1943, vol. II, July-December, p. 130.

42. *Amria Bazar Patrika*, 20 October 1942.

43. *Advance*, 23 November 1942.

When the Assembly met for the budget session next February, Shyama Prasad on the very first day issued a long statement describing the events leading to his resignation and pointing out specific instances :

As members of the House are aware, I felt compelled to resign first because I found that the continued policy of the British government in this country was to ignore the claim of Indians to fuller political power, to hamper good government and to weaken the forces of people's defence against enemy aggression. During my experience as a minister I found to my utter surprise that in many vital matters affecting the rights and liberty of the people the advice tendered by the ministers was invariably subject to revision in the light of the counsel tendered by the more trusted members of the Services whose omnipotence was almost of a divine character.<sup>44</sup>

All these added to the difficulties of Fazlul Huq. Some felt that he should have resigned with Shyama Prasad. A section of his Muslim followers became critical of too much reliance on Hindu support and in October 1942 formed themselves into a new party known as the Independent Muslim Assembly Party within the coalition. The European Party asked Fazlul Huq to dissociate himself from Shyama Prasad statement which he could not. "Personally I was not prepared categorically to deny all that Dr. Mookherjee had said; there was much in the statement with which I certainly agreed"<sup>45</sup>, he said.

The food situation of Bengal during 1942 was quite alarming. Firstly, there had been a fall in production to the tune of 2.4 millions tons of rice during 1942-43. Secondly, due to the Japanese occupation of Burma, normal inflow of rice to the tune of 200,000 tons stopped. Thirdly, in April 1942 the Government introduced a scheme of removing surplus rice from three districts in Bengal and destroying boats in the rivers of East Bengal thereby dislocating the communication

44. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, 12 February 1943. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LXIV, no. 1, pp. 25 and 27.

45. Huq, n. 26, p. 25.

system which was vital for regular supply of foodstuffs. Along with this the Government imposed a procurement levy to have foodgrains for the use of its fighting forces, workers in war industries and officers of all grades. These measures were initiated directly by the Governor through civil servants without going through the ministries concerned or seeking the Prime Minister's advice. Fazlul Huq charged the Governor in his letter of 2 August 1942 : "At the present moment we are faced with a rice famine in Bengal mainly in consequence of an uncalled for interference on your part, and of hasty action on the part of the Joint Secretary."<sup>46</sup>

In the Assembly, the Muslim League tried to censure the Government for its alleged failure to tackle satisfactorily the food situation in the province. Syed Abdul Majid said : "... to what extent the security of the province has been endangered by the mishandling of the food problem by the Government is manifest from the chorus of condemnation of the ministry's food policy from all sections of the House." He suggested that the House should "consider whether it is safe to leave the direction of affairs in the paralysed hands of the present regime."<sup>47</sup> While the European and some Muslim League members strongly criticised the Government for its 'failure' and suggested 'quick decision by Government',<sup>48</sup> the more vocal League members directed their attack towards the ministry and its personnel. Tamizuddin Khan introduced a resolution on 10 March 1943, which was in the nature of a censure motion against the ministry.<sup>49</sup>

However, the Muslim League resolution was rejected by 92 to 78 votes. In winding up the debate, Fazlul Huq detailed the measures the Government proposed to take to meet the situation. Absolving the ministry of all charges, he pointed out that the failure in this respect had been due to "matters

46. This letter and a number of others were included in his statement "Why I resigned" on the floor of Assembly on 5 July 1943, n. 49. See also Appendix VI for extract from the letter.

47. Syed Abdul Majid, 25 February 1943, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LXIV, no. 2, p. 11.

48. H.S. Suhrawardy, J.R. Walker, 10 March 1943, *ibid.*, vol. LXIV, no. 3, pp. 42-48.

49. Tamizuddin Khan, 10 March 1943, *ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

over which we have no control". He declared: "We have done our best to meet the situation and if we have not been able to tackle the problem in all its aspects, I submit, it has not been due to any lack of efforts on our part."<sup>50</sup>

The third item which created enormous tension in the Assembly and put Fazlul Huq on the mat was the incident of police firing into a mosque in Kishoreganj in Mymensingh district. On 19 October 1942 one Khitish Chandra Burman took out a Puja procession with music despite an understanding between the two communities that music should not be played in a procession while passing by a mosque. The Muslims of the area collected in Purana Thana Mosque and when the procession with police escort passed by the mosque there was reportedly a lathi-charge by the police while it was subjected to brickbattling.<sup>51</sup> The police ultimately resorted to firing which led to the death of two Muslims inside the mosque and two more deaths in hospital within a few hours; fifteen were injured. The mosque and the minaret bore a number of bullet marks. The incident was serious enough to spark off tension all over Bengal and it came handy to the Muslim League leaders to start their political campaign against the ministry. The campaign was strong for good reasons: firstly, for the first time in the history of Bengal there had been firing inside a mosque and Muslims had become 'Shaheed'. Secondly, the firing came after Fazlul Huq had joined hands with Hindu political parties and had been called a 'traitor' and 'betrayer' of Muslim cause for this act.

That Fazlul Huq should take up the issue officially was the least Muslims expected even though he visited Kishoreganj and promised to redress the grievances of the local Muslims. The League made capital out of this incident and pointed out to Muslims that since the Huq ministry was controlled by the Hindu Mahasabha it was inimical to Muslim

50. A.K. Fazlul Huq, 10 March 1943, *ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

51. In view of contradictory versions published in the press it is difficult to ascertain how this thing started. Obviously the Government report absolved the police of the responsibility of starting the thing. *Star of India*, 20 October 1942; *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 October 1942.

feelings. The League conducted an enquiry, prepared a detailed report and made district officials responsible for the incident and demanded their prosecution, but without any result. The government only ordered that in future processions passing by that mosque "shall not go with music".<sup>52</sup> This little gesture on the part of the government could hardly satisfy the Muslim public which was highly excited over the issue.

Fazlul Huq could not order judicial enquiry into the matter because by that time his relations with the Governor had become considerably strained, and he was doubtful whether the latter would agree to his proposal. Secondly, he might have felt that his public support to a cause which was religious would be misunderstood by his Congress and Hindu supporters. The lack of a bold stand on an issue over which ordinary Muslims were highly excited cost him considerable popularity among them.

The attitudes of the Muslim League and the European bloc on these issues during discussion in the legislature showed that these parties wanted to censure the ministry on matters not directly related to general interests of the people. During the budget session in 1943 (from 12 February to 29 March) when ultimately Fazlul Huq had to resign the official Congress party came to his rescue on many an occasion. Thwarted in the attempt to defeat the ministry during the food debate, Tamizuddin Khan, ex-minister, moved on 23 March 1943, on behalf of the Muslim League, what he described as a motion of censure against the ministry. He wanted to raise a discussion on "the faillure of the ministry to assume responsibility for the actions of officers of the Government" and criticised it for this "grave constitutional delinquency".<sup>53</sup> He condemned the ministry's "adherence to office" in spite of its disagreement with the Government of India with regard to their policy to combat the August movement. Instead of publicly avowing their disagreement and resigning the office

52. Fazlul Huq, 27 March 1943, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LXIV, no. 3, p. 707.

53. Tamizuddin Khan, 23 March 1943, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LXIV, no. 3, pp. 477-81.



the ministry had taken shelter under the "dangerous and preposterous alternative" of denying responsibility for the officers' action. David Hendry, leader of the European group said that if a ministry lost its grip on the administration it should "make way for those who with an equal knowledge of the constitution are prepared honestly to accept the responsibilities of office".<sup>54</sup>

Kiran Shankar Roy, leader of the official Congress, described the motion and the attitude of its supporters as a "bomb-shell", particularly when some leading members of the legislature were trying to form "an administrative cabinet of all parties prepared to work the present constitution", minus the official Congress.<sup>55</sup> Shyama Prasad Mukherjee accused the Governor of striking at the root of the constitution and made an appeal for unity saying, "It is for us to forget our party affiliations for the time being, keep controversies aside for the present and unite on the basis of one constructive programme and it is then and then alone that we can truly and faithfully serve the interests of the people of this province."<sup>56</sup>

Suhrawardy retorted saying that Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's plea of unity was an attempt "to create disunity among Muslims so that his community could rule Bengal".<sup>57</sup> The attempt to view everything from the communal angle had become the main feature of the Muslim League legislative politics. From December 1941 when the League was dislodged from power (by Fazlul Huq's Progressive Coalition Party), it could gain only by raising issues of Muslim interests and Suhrawardy became the principal spokesman of this policy. He said that some Hindu leaders were still utilizing Fazlul Huq but he did not think that the latter could get "the support of that vast and growing majority of the Hindus" and was supported by only those Hindus who wanted the ministry to continue because through Huq they were in a position to exert their influence on the administration.<sup>58</sup>

54. David Hendry, 24 March 1943, *ibid.*, p. 557.

55. Kiran Shankar Roy, 23 March 1943, *ibid.*, p. 564.

56. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, *ibid.*, p. 597.

57. H.S. Suhrawardy, 24 March 1943, *ibid.*, p. 580.

58. *Ibid.*, 27 March 1943, p. 732.

Suhrawardy had been speaking on a motion moved by K.A. Hamilton of the European group on 27 March to censure the Government for alleged failure to deal with black market and speculation in hoarding of foodstuffs. This was another attempt by the European group and the Muslim League combine to dislodge the ministry after the League's censure motion was defeated on 23 March. When this also did not succeed, the Governor intervened and forced Fazlul Huq to resign on 28 March. On 29 March Fazlul Huq made the following statement in the legislature :

Sir, it is true that last night I was sent for by the Governor and I was with him from about 7.30 to over 9 p.m. A long discussion took place about the formation of a national cabinet and various proposals were put forward, some of which I could not accept consistent with self-respect. His Excellency the Governor suggested to me that I should formally tender my resignation. I said I could not do so unless I had time to consult my party and my colleagues. To this, the Governor did not agree and I had to sign a letter of resignation . . . . The letter of resignation which I was made to submit has been accepted by His Excellency and the letter of acceptance reached me last night at about 10 p.m.<sup>59</sup>

### III

To those who had known the inner working of the Government the dismissal of Fazlul Huq could not have come as a surprise. Throughout 1942 the Prime Minister and other ministers had disagreements with the Governor and other British officials about the policies to be pursued. Firstly, there were cases where the Governor's "personal interference in almost every **matter** of administrative details and even in those" where his interference was definitely excluded by the Government of India Act, became the rule of the day. The ministers bitterly resented these "impediments in the way of

59. Fazlul Huq, 29 March 1943, *ibid.*, p. 753.

the exercise of the very limited powers which they possess under the Act.”<sup>60</sup> In the second category fell cases in which the Governor “directly or indirectly encouraged sections of permanent officials to flout the authority of ministers, leading them to ignore ministers altogether”,<sup>61</sup> and to deal directly with the Governor as if the ministers did not exist. Fazlul Huq deeply deplored the situation saying that “the ministers have been given a mockery of authority, and the steel frame of the Imperial Services still remains intact dominating the entire administration.”<sup>62</sup> Permanent officials, he went on to say, “have got all the powers but no responsibility, whereas the ministers have all the responsibility and no powers”.

That Fazlul Huq’s allegations were not an afterthought following his removal from Premiership is evident from a perusal of the Home (Political) and Defence files of the Government of Bengal for the year 1942.<sup>63</sup> As it was, defence requirements had taken away from the cabinet the power of decision making and vested it in the military authority. But even the implementation and administration of the policies affecting the life of ordinary people was pursued without reference to the ministers and in many cases the concerned minister was not even aware of what was going on.

In March, in view of the war situation, the British Government decided on a “scorched earth” policy.<sup>64</sup> Parts of the letter from the military authority to the Chief Secretary of Bengal conveying this decision ran as follows :

It has been decided with the approval of H.E. the Governor General’s Executive Council that a complete

60. Fazlul Huq’s letter to the Governor dated 2 August 1942, n. 59. See Appendix VI.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. The files mentioned in this Section had been consulted at the Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca.

64. Order no. 42611/X/G.s. (O) dated Ranchi 12/13 March 1942 on *Denial Policy*. Government of Bengal, Defence Confidential File W 268 of 1942. There are 88 confidential Defence Files under heads: Denial Policy, Denial of Boats, Denial of Transport, and Transport of Rice and Paddy from the denial areas.

scorched earth policy for the whole of India is neither practicable nor desirable. A 'denial' policy has however been formulated and this will be put into effect in certain emergencies. Briefly, the policy consists of denial to the enemy of certain stocks and services by destruction or removal of essentials within defined limits of threatened areas to be carried out in the event of invasion. Bengal is included in these areas. The responsibility for initiating, coordinating and approving plans based on this policy is vested in the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief and that for ordering plans to be put into execution in the local military authority, but the closest cooperation of the civil authorities will be required when time comes to translate the plan into action. I do not propose to go into details at the present juncture or to say more than that the military is already making preparations to carry out the scheme should occasion arise.<sup>65</sup>

The military decisions were very clear and specific but they did not debar the Governor from confiding them to the ministers when the time came to translate the plans into action. The Governor, however, did not consult his Prime Minister or other ministers and straightaway directed the British officer of the rank of Joint Secretary to remove the surplus stocks of rice and paddy from the coastal districts. Fazlul Huq, in his letter dated 2 August 1942 to the Governor, accused : "You acted as if the Government of India Act has been suspended in Bengal."<sup>66</sup> He continued :

In a matter of such vital importance, affecting the question of the foodstuff of the people, you should have called an emergent meeting of the Cabinet and discussed with your Ministers the best means of carrying out the wishes of the military authorities and of the

65. Letter no. D.O. C.L.O. Bengal dated Ranchi 11 March 1942 from Civil Liaison Officer to the Chief Secretary of Bengal, Government of Bengal, Defence Confidential File W 268/42.

66. See n. 46 and Appendix VI.

Central Government. But you did nothing of the kind. You did not even send for the Minister-in-charge of the Department although he was readily available but you sent for the Joint Secretary instead. You gave him orders to take up the work of removal at once, without caring to find out the exact position regarding the excess of rice and paddy in different areas . . . . The Joint Secretary says that when he was arranging to carry out your orders, you grew impatient and gave him definite directions to arrange for the removal of excess rice from three districts within 24 hours.

Fazlul Huq concluded that Bengal was faced with a rice famine due to this hasty action of the Governor.

With respect to the boat-removal policy under the denial scheme, the Governor appointed G.R. Hollingberry as Special Officer to draw up a scheme for withdrawal of country boats and appointed I.G. Pinnell as Additional Commissioner, Coastal Division, to carry out the plan of removal or destruction of country boats in the coastal areas. All this happened without the knowledge of the Home Minister who happened to be the Prime Minister as well. As many as 30,000 country boats were destroyed under this scheme.

Provincial autonomy became a further mockery, as alleged by Fazlul Huq and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, when under the Civil Pioneer Force Ordinance almost all the powers of the Bengal Government with respect to disposal of food and essential commodities and maintenance of law and order were delegated to the Controller of Civil Pioneer Force.<sup>67</sup> In the plan for maintenance of close contact between civil officers and military commanders in Bengal, the ministers were scrupulously avoided. Instead, a system of direct rapport between British permanent officials and the military authority was established. Government factories and railway workshops were taken out of the control of the Government of Bengal. Conceding that in these matters military urgency was paramount, the conclusion is, nevertheless, inescapable that the Governor and British Officials

67. Government of Bengal, Defence Confidential File W 191 (XXXIII)/42.

in Bengal from the beginning were hostile to Fazlul Huq and his ministry.

Even in the sphere of day to day administration the ministry's experience was far from happy. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee resigned on 20 November 1942 for the same reasons which Fazlul Huq had mentioned in his letter. His statement at the time of resignation contained charges of a similar nature :

My experience as a provincial minister for eleven months justifies me in stating, clearly and categorically, that ministers, while possessing great responsibilities for which they are answerable to the people and the legislature, have very little powers, especially in matters concerning the rights and liberties of the people. The Governor has chosen to act, in many vital matters, in disregard of the wishes of the ministers and has depended on the advice of a section of permanent officials, who are indifferent to the interest of the province.<sup>68</sup>

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee also made certain specific charges. No statement either of contradiction or denial was issued by the Government.

Fazlul Huq's experience with departmental secretaries was still worse. He had continued friction with British officials in the matter of their attitude towards the Muslim League and its leaders. After his break with the Muslim League a struggle ensued for the leadership of the Muslim masses between his Progressive Group on the one hand and Muslim League leaders like Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy and Akram Khan on the other. Both groups went to the countryside to explain their points of view and to mobilize support. Some untoward incidents followed during which officials tended to favour the Muslim League leaders.<sup>69</sup> At times even the Chief Secretary intervened in favor of the League leaders.

68. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 684/42. Also *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 23 November 1942; *The Statesman*, 23 November 1942. In his statement before the Legislative Assembly on 12 February 1943 Shyama Prasad repeated these allegations. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LXIV, no. 1, pp. 24-27.

69. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 96/42, 388/42, 402/42 and Confidential File 402 Confd. 1/42 available at Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca.

The incident which occurred at Feni (Noakhali district) illustrated how permanent officials at the Secretariat were set against Fazlul Huq. They behaved like that even against the advice of local officials like the District Magistrate and the Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong. On 10 January 1942 Nazimuddin and some other League leaders visited Noakhali when there was a black flag demonstration against them by local Muslims. Volunteers of the Muslim League under the direction of Mujibur Rahman, Secretary, Noakhali District League, tried to snatch the black flag and there ensued a scuffle. Sometime later when the Prime Minister and his party went to visit Noakhali, students and Muslim League members behaved disgracefully. Students of the Muslim Hostel of Feni College stood naked at the door and windows of the college and behaved in an indecent manner on which the Principal expelled them from the college. "When the Chief Minister was passing from Lakhimpur to Raipur, Maulvi Abul Hakim of Feni and Muslim League members waited in ambush and threw mud in his car. He was arrested and let off with a warning".<sup>70</sup>

Suhrawardy visited Noakhali in this connection and represented to the District Magistrate about police action against Muslim League members. "He then accused me of taking strong action against the Muslim League leaders of this place and said that he had a discussion with the Governor about them", reported J.N. Mitra, the District Magistrate, to O.M. Martin, Commissioner, Chittagong.<sup>71</sup> However, before any

70. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 96/42.

71. D.O. C. 217C dated 4 February 1942 from J.N. Mitra, District Magistrate to O.M. Martin, Commissioner, Chittagong, *ibid.* The report continues: "I told him that action had been taken in the district where necessary as the local leaders of Muslim League were propagating class hatred and communal passion in connection with their propaganda. He (Suhrawardy) said that the policy of the Muslim League was not to quarrel with the Hindus and that all their quarrel was with Fazlul Huq. I told him if that was so, why did Sir Nazimuddin allow Khan Bahadur Abdul Gafoor, the President of District Muslim League, to make a highly communal speech. I also mentioned him that the Secretary of District League, Maulvi Mujibur Rahman Muktear had issued highly inflammatory pamphlets attacking not merely the Hon. Chief Minister but also the Hindu religion, the Hindu culture and society. He had attacked S.P. Mukherjee on account of his previous utterances ignoring the fact that he has now become

action could be taken Blandy, Chief Secretary, directed the Chittagong Commissioner to withdraw the cases against students who by that time had resorted to strike. The Chittagong Commissioner in reply reported: "the strike is continuing and it would be better to close down the college altogether, rather than yield. The trouble is being fomented by H.S. Suhrawardy". He suggested that

we might have to go further and prevent Suhrawardy from entering Noakhali district again. It has been an accepted policy in Noakhali to take a very strong line against communal agitators. This policy has been pursued consistently for some years with success and I consider it essential for the peace of the district that leniency should not be shown towards any agitators.<sup>72</sup>

However, the Commissioner was informed "that the Government consider that it would be inexpedient at present to restrain Suhrawardy".<sup>73</sup> When the file went to Fazlul Huq before this order was issued he commented on 25 February 1942 that "no doubt that Suhrawardy is at the root of all the troubles at Feni. If action is not taken against Suhrawardy—and I feel the difficulties in the way—something should be done to expose Suhrawardy so that public may know how lenient we have been with him".<sup>74</sup>

In connection with the incident at Feni two prosecution cases were pending against Mujibur Rahman. He also filed two cases against the black flag demonstrators and the police. The Chief Secretary wrote to R.A. Dutch, Magistrate and Collector, Noakhali, suggesting the transfer of the cases to Additional District Magistrate with the comment "that a certain amount of politics was involved". Ultimately Mujibur Rahman was let off

a minister and as such entitled to respect. Mr. Suhrawardy had then to admit that these leaders had gone to some excess."

72. D.O. no. 103/C dated 15 February 1942 from Commissioner, Chittagong to the Chief Secretary. Ibid.

73. Letter D.O. 774 dated 4 March 1942 from Blandy to O.M. Martin. Ibid.

74. Fazlul Huq's note on 25 February 1942 on the file.



on the ground "that there was insufficient material to frame a charge".<sup>75</sup> Before this Fazlul Huq had suggested certain action as is evident from the file but this was not carried out. This prompted Fazlul Huq to comment:

The feelings of the Muslim community in Noakhali had already been aroused to its high pitch by false propaganda and I did not like that the prosecution against Mukhtear should end in fiasco. My regret is that my remarks about the Muslim League and Muslim Leaguers are generally being misunderstood by permanent officials.<sup>76</sup>

The incident at Noakhali led to much excitement all over Bengal and almost became a prestige issue with the Muslim League leadership. Suhrawardy went to Noakhali again on 20 and 21 February to defend the students in court. He was extended all facilities by Government officials. Mujibur Rahman gave a very inflammatory speech at the Dak Bungalow where students had assembled to meet Suhrawardy.

Exasperated Fazlul Huq wanted to discuss the issue with the Governor and raise it at the cabinet meeting in order to decide the relationship between permanent officials and ministers. Accordingly, on 13 July 1942 he wrote the following note to the Chief Secretary :

During the last seven months the leaders of the Muslim League have had the greatest latitude in carrying on their propaganda throughout the province.... In each meeting atrocious lies have been circulated about me and my cabinet generally. The sympathy of Muslim officers for this anti-Hindu propaganda is well known and well established. The result has been that Muslim feeling in Bengal has been illegally and unnaturally worked up against the present Ministry and therefore against the present Government. In the eyes of the

75. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 388/42, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca.

76. Ibid.

public there is no distinction between a Ministry and a Government. I feel that the time has come when drastic step should be taken to curb the activities of at least the most notable amongst the culprits. As I wish to ascertain the views of my colleagues I want this case to be discussed in the Cabinet.<sup>77</sup>

He again wrote to the Chief Secretary on 15 July 1942 about the Noakhali incident and the behaviour of Mujibur Rahman : "He disgraced me twice in the eyes of the public. I know that officials are League-minded and I do not mind saying so very frankly to you." He continued, "...but as Minister in charge of the Home Department, I have had to resent very much the manner in which my administration is being flouted by even responsible officers. I am not making this remark on account of what had happened at Noakhali but this is my general impression."<sup>78</sup>

A perusal of the note sheet of the file gives the idea that the subject matter was deleted by the Chief Secretary from the agenda of the Cabinet meetings held on 16 July, 23 July, 31 July and 6 August 1942. Ultimately on Fazlul Huq's insistence it was included in the agenda of the Cabinet Meeting held on 13 August but the question was split into two in the form (1) activities of Muslim League members, (2) question of relation of permanent officials to ministers. The edge of importance of the question of partiality of permanent officials towards Muslim League leaders was dulled by this break-up. Before the meeting was held the 'Quit India' movement started and the Government of India decided on a policy "of mobilizing all possible elements in opposition to the Congress movement. This mobilization should include parties and organisations which are willing to cooperative with us in fighting a mass movement likely to lead to serious disturbances".<sup>79</sup>

77. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 378/42, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca.

78. Ibid.

79. Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal D.O. letters no. 2127 dated 6 August 1942 and 2152 dated 8 August 1942 to all the District Officers. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 717/42, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca.

The issue lost all importance in these changed circumstances and gave the Muslim League another boost.

Some cases in which Fazlul Huq had conflict with permanent officials on minor administrative matters are detailed below :

When the Muslim League Government was toppled by the Progressive Coalition Party in December 1941 all local British officials asked from the Government instructions regarding the attitude to be adopted in regard to the Muslim League and the meetings organised by it. In reply, the Home Ministry issued instructions, some of which are reproduced below: (1) ... (2) "Government servants are expected to dissociate themselves from party meetings of any character that is to say, whether they are meetings of the members of the party in power or that in opposition : (3) Nor by joining in social entertainment and the like should they give colour to the idea that their sympathies are with the opposition."<sup>80</sup> The perusal of the note sheet gives an inkling of the inside story. The draft containing the above instructions was prepared without being shown to Fazlul Huq, the then Home Minister. When Fazlul Huq intervened and modified the draft, the final letter was issued without the modifications suggested by him and even without his knowledge.<sup>81</sup> The file was then closed and sent to the record office.

In December 1942 the Commissioner of Rajshahi Division said in his fortnightly report :

The friction between the local representatives of the Muslim League and of the Progressive Muslim Party seems to be boiling up in several districts and is manifesting itself in local self-governing institutions where resolutions are being moved to get rid of Muslim League office-bearers on the ground of incompetence. A month or two ago such action was taken in Rajshahi. Now there is a similar move in the Dinajpur Municipality. Though in neither case the local institutions have

80. Government instructions Memo no. 5122P dated 10 January 1942 from the Chief Secretary to all Commissioners, *ibid*.

81. *Ibid*.

been the model of perfection, I believe that they have not been so badly run as to merit stigmatising these office-bearers as unfit for their jobs.<sup>82</sup>

When the file came to Fazlul Huq, he commented that this "is a perfectly legitimate step if they are sought to be removed on the ground of incompetence. It is for the members to judge whether they are actually so or not. Why does the Commissioner worry about it."<sup>83</sup> However, the Instruction which was sent to the Commissioner asked him to "try to put an end to this through the official members in the District Board and Municipality."<sup>84</sup>

When opposition to Fazlul Huq and the new ministry by permanent officials and also the anti-ministry policies by the Muslim League and the European bloc in the legislature, as discussed earlier, did not succeed in bringing about the fall of the Government, the Governor compelled Fazlul Huq to resign on 28 March 1943.<sup>85</sup> The Muslim League Leaders could foretell that the Ministry would come to an end very soon and it showed the way the wind was blowing. In its editorials

82. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 710/42, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

85. Nicholas Mansergh, *Transfer of Power, 1942-7* (London, 1971), vol. III, p. 875. The facts that the letter was kept typed and that Fazlul Huq was not allowed any choice and was not allowed to consult his party colleagues and that he was asked to resign even though he enjoyed majority in the legislature are established by this document. However, the contention of Herbert as made in his secraphone telegram dated 31 March to the Viceroy (please refer note 4 of the document) that in the division in the legislature on 27 March Fazlul Huq won only by 10 votes of Congress members who normally did not vote at all, is not tenable in view of the facts that in cases of all the no-confidence motions (there was another one by the Muslim League a few days earlier) Congress always voted with the ministerial party and also it is a fact that in respect of divisions called by Muslim League opposition it never voted against the ministerial party on motion brought out by them. Secondly, true that in some cases of voting Congress remained neutral, but not on matters affecting the vital interest of people and country.

Herbert's contention that it was Fazlul Huq who made the incident public by his statement on the floor of legislature on 29 March against the

"Last Day's Call" and "Huq Saheb's Ujiri" on 28 March—the same night Fazlul Huq was forced to resign—*Azad* commented that "Haquai ministry would come to an end before Monday (i.e. 29 March)." An appeal was made in the same issue on behalf of the leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party asking all its members to attend the meeting of the Parliamentary Party at the residence of Suhrawardy at 9 a.m. on that date and directing them not to leave Calcutta and to be present at Assembly House at 9 a.m. on Monday i.e. 29 March 1943.<sup>86</sup>

#### IV

Fazlul Huq's dismissal gave a severe blow to the efforts he had been making during the second spell of his Premiership for initiating a new trend in Bengal's Muslim politics. He failed to build up his inter-communal stance. He failed not due to lack of sincere and positive efforts on his part but because of the fact that he had to work under severe limitations. He did not have organizational support behind him and times were not propitious for the growth of a regional party.

Fazlul Huq had undertaken several positive steps to build up his inter-communal policy. At the governmental level a scheme for promotion and maintenance of communal harmony had been drawn up in consultation with local officers. The officers were asked to give effect to the scheme. An amount of Rs. 100,000 was earmarked in the budget for 1942-43 for promotion of communal harmony. It was well conceived though nothing was new or unusual. The Punjab, the other Muslim majority province, had a similar scheme and same amount of money for was provided for this purpose every year.

At the non-governmental level efforts were made both to promise he made, does not seem tenable also in view of the fact that the morning newspapers of both opposition and Muslim League came out with the news and almost all the members in the legislature were in the know of this development.

86. *Azad*, 28 March 1943.

mobilize support for this new move in Muslim politics as well as to try for an alternative base for party politics. The practicability of fostering an inter-communal party looked doubtful in an atmosphere charged with communal passion. The Krishak Praja Party, which served as a jumping ground for Fazlul Huq when he differed with the Muslim League, had only Muslim members in the legislature, and lost its vitality and utility during 1937-41 after Fazlul Huq joined the Muslim League and the ministry tried to adopt many of the economic programmes of the Krishak Praja Party.

How to rally people's support for this inter-communal platform and to get Muslim acceptance of this new policy became a crucial test for Fazlul Huq. His supporters could hardly afford to drop the word, 'Muslim' from their politics as this would have cost them the support of Muslim masses who through the work of the ministry during 1937-41 had heard extensively of 'Muslim interests' and 'Muslim feeling'. Moreover, he along with his supporters had openly been called a 'betrayal' of Muslim interests by the League leadership. All these weighed heavily against them. The younger section of the group in February 1942 called a meeting of the Muslim Majlis in Calcutta and formed a Provisional Standing Committee with Fazlul Huq as President and Humayun Kabir as Secretary. This step was taken with a view to spearhead a Muslim movement in Calcutta by progressive forces, which proved to be a blunder as it were. They should have instead fanned out to the countryside where Muslim Leaders had intensified their activities.

In June 1942 a conference at Calcutta under the auspices of the Hindu-Muslim Unity Association was attended by leading Muslim and Hindu leaders of Bengal under the presidentship of the Nawab of Dacca. The association had been set up by the Nawab of Murshidabad a few years earlier to work for the promotion of goodwill between the two communities. In the changed atmosphere of 1942 this association also came forward to help the new trend. Fazlul Huq gave a very inspiring speech at the conference. "Hindus and Muslims must realise", he said, "that they have got to live together, sink or swim together and, if need be, lay down

their lives together for the good of their motherland." He further pointed out that "the time was absolutely past when mischief-makers could hoodwink the Muslim community in the belief that its salvation of the Muslim community lay not in unity but in disunity and discord".<sup>87</sup> The conference proposed to establish a permanent non-party organization to carry on the work of creating an atmosphere of communal harmony and co-operation.

But these efforts could not match the propaganda and publicity of the Muslim League. As stated earlier, the League had already won the hearts of the Muslim masses by being identified, by common Muslim acclaim, with the beneficial activities of the ministry during 1937-41. Fazlul Huq realized that any venture outside the Muslim League was thus not going to take him far with the Muslim masses. The ministry's constant friction with the Governor and British officials, he sensed, was pushing him towards political extinction as the British wanted to have a docile ministry in the difficult war situation. At the same time the open revolt by the Congress in August 1942 left little elbow room for him at the party level. Subhas Bose's disappearance and Sarat Bose's arrest put a big question mark on the undivided Hindu support to him. He consequently thought it prudent not to dissociate completely with the Muslim League, especially since his revolt was against the men at the helm of the affairs in the Muslim League rather than against the League ideals. Finally, he proposed formation of a Progressive Muslim League and addressed a letter to prominent Muslim League leaders throughout India on 20 June 1942.

The proposal, however, was altogether wrongly conceived. Instead of injecting radical and democratic ideas into the Progressive Muslim League his attempt seemed to be to use the Muslim League's own currency as shown by his calling the existing Muslim League atmosphere "un-Islamic." "I feel very strongly that the Muslim League should be under the guidance of real and genuine Muslims. Before any one can claim to be a Muslim Leaguer, he must first be a true and genuine

87. *Hindusthan Standard*, 21 June 1942.

Muslim", he wrote in his letter to the leaders.<sup>88</sup> "It is the will of one man that prevails", he continued, "and the members of the League are generally not permitted to have any will or opinion of their own." Also he made a scathing attack on Jinnah as he went on "and this one man was more haughty and arrogant than the proudest of the Pharaohs. To add to our miseries, this superman has been allowed to exercise irresponsible powers which even the Czars in their wildest dreams might have envied." Explaining the aims of the Progressive Muslim League, he said: "The Progressive Muslim League which I visualise would be distinctly Islamic in its ideals and would lead the Muslims to have a broad political outlook, while maintaining the utmost fidelity to the best interests of Islam, will also keep in view the interest of the country as a whole."

He contended that unity between Muslims and other communities "has got to be regarded as a fundamental necessity for the political advancement of India".

Irrespective of the response it received from leaders outside Bengal, in Bengal the proposal did receive some support. The forces which had been outside the Muslim League like the Bengal Provincial Muslim Association and the Nikhil Banga Bangali Mussalman Chatra Samity which believed in better understanding between the two communities, extended him a helping hand. To the ordinary Muslim, however, the idea of the Progressive Muslim League when set against the existing Muslim League, did not seem very different. But the effort failed not because the idea did not make any sense with the common Muslims but because of the fact that the experiment was made in a difficult period of history in Bengal, and Fazlul Huq was not in power for long to sustain the move.

Besides the fact that there were inherent weaknesses in Fazlul Huq's move as discussed above, there were other factors as well. Firstly, there were the imperative British interests in India, particularly in Bengal, in view of the impending Japanese attack. Secondly, when the hard core of Muslim League leaders were thrown out of power by Fazlul Huq in December 1941 they had gone about energetically building up the party at the

88. Ibid.



mass level. These two crucial factors throw light on why Fazlul Huq did not succeed in his political gamble and had to be in political banishment till partition.

When the differences between Muslim leaders in Bengal and Fazlul Huq surfaced, the League leaders resigned on their own, thereby bringing down Huq's ministry. They did this obviously on the assurance of the Governor to Nazimuddin that the League would be called upon to form the ministry.<sup>89</sup> Fazlul Huq outmanoeuvred this move by forming the Progressive Coalition Party for which talks had been in progress for some days and promptly accepted its leadership. Thereby he mustered majority support for a claim to form the ministry. Even then the Governor delayed, and the subsequent change in the international situation brought about by Japan's joining the war and the bombing of Pearl Harbour forced the British to think of a new ministry in Bengal. But they could ill-afford too independent a ministry and intervened to cripple the major support behind Fazlul Huq. Sarat Chandra Bose was arrested early in the morning on the day of the formation of the new cabinet.<sup>90</sup> Thus the honest effort of Fazlul Huq to put an inter-communal stance, and his expectation that he could rise above the communal bickerings of the time were not allowed to be fulfilled.

Fazlul Huq and Sarat Bose together, with the organizational support behind them, were in a position to give a fresh and correct lead to Bengal politics and bring it out of the communal low which it had attained by then. Sarat Bose was the only Hindu leader who was acceptable to Muslims and at the same time could carry Hindus with him just as Fazlul Huq was the only Muslim leader who was acceptable to Hindus and who also had tremendous influence on Muslims. This happy combination which was full of potentialities was never allowed a chance.

After Sarat Bose's arrest the mantle of Hindu leadership in

89. Nazimuddin's letter dated 14 December 1941 to Liaquat Ali Khan, Government of India, Home Political File 232/41. See Appendix V for the extracts from the letter.

90. Government of Bengal War File W142 of 1942, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca.

Fazlul Huq's new cabinet naturally fell on Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, which only strengthened communalism in Bengal and prevented the growth of the politics of Hindu-Muslim unity which Fazlul Huq now spearheaded. Though Fazlul Huq's was essentially a Muslim politics, the trend he attempted to set in Bengal was based on the unity of political purpose between Hindus and Muslims. He wanted to initiate the process by uniting in the ministerial field the divergent elements in politics outside the Muslim League and thereby to isolate its leaders in the province. But the arrest of Sarat Bose on the eve of the formation of the ministry had nipped this possibility in the bud. The intense feeling of hatred Muslims had against Shyama Prasad and the Hindu Mahasabha outweighed the love they had for Fazlul Huq. Their combination without Sarat Bose quickly gave a potent argument to the Muslim League leaders to convince the Muslim masses that Fazlul Huq had joined hands with an organization, which was anti-Muslim, for his personal gain. As a result the Muslim masses deserted him.

The possible British intention in arresting Sarat Bose is a point of argument. British apprehension of increased fifth column activities by the Forward Bloc with Japan's entry into the war on the side of the Axis Powers could be one reason.<sup>91</sup> It seems more possible, however, that they were afraid of the formation of an independent ministry in Bengal in view of the reverses in the eastern theatre of war. Under the circumstances the British needed a docile ministry for which Nazimuddin seemed a safer bet. British permanent officials and the Governor had enormous confidence in him because of his long association with the Government either as a minister or as a member of the Governor's Executive Council under the system of dyarchy. The fact that Sarat Bose was arrested early in the morning on the day of the formation of the ministry while the press communique issued by the Government of India said that he was arrested in the afternoon shows that the Government of Bengal had a say in this matter.

91. MSS EUR F. 125/12 dated 21 January 1942. Mansergh, n. 85, vol. I, p. 48. "The assessment of political and constitutional position in India and the suggestions thereon submitted by Viceroy Linlithgow for his Majesty's Government."

## V

While it is difficult to say what might have been the shape of Muslim politics in Bengal in subsequent years if Fazlul Huq's second ministry had not been dismissed in 1943, it cannot be denied that even while in opposition the Muslim League had continued to strengthen its hold on the Muslim masses.

Fazlul Huq's formation of the Progressive Coalition Party and the Muslim League's dissociation from power was a challenge to Muslim League leaders and required a policy and programme on their part to revitalise the organization, something they had ignored during the years of power. On their ability to meet the challenge posed by Fazlul Huq's weaning away a substantial number of Muslim League MLAs depended the future of the party in Bengal. Its long association with power had kept the ball rolling and all that was needed was purposeful organizational work.

Following the developments in December 1941 the Muslim League leaders starting from Akram Khan down to the student leader Abdul Waseque responded to the new need sharply and quickly. Immediately after the fall of the first Huq Ministry, the Muslim League ex-ministers—Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy and Tamizuddin Khan—and important leaders like Akram Khan, Muazzamuddin Hossain, Nawabzada Khwaja Nasrullah<sup>92</sup> and student leaders like Waseque and Fazlur Kadar Choudhury set out on a long tour of the entire province. On 3 January 1942 *Azad* wrote an editorial greeting them and glorifying this incident as "Kafela's journey".<sup>93</sup> Besides the fact of their being ousted from power, they were also actuated by the need to mobilise Muslim opinion in order to bring about the downfall of the ministry. That their principal object in undertaking this tour was to rouse the Muslim feeling against Fazlul Huq by portraying him as a betrayer of the Muslim cause can be seen

92. Nawab Nasrullah was the younger brother of Nawab Habibullah of Dacca. He was one of the four Parliamentary Secretaries in the outgoing ministry. While Habibullah broke with the Muslim League and joined Fazlul Huq, Nasrullah continued with the Muslim League.

93. *Azad*, 3 January 1942. Also mentioned in Waliullah, n. 8, p. 388.

from the speeches delivered by League leaders at different meetings.

Both the League newspapers *Azad* and *Star of India* carried an incessant campaign against Fazlul Huq and the Muslim members of the legislature who had joined his ministry.<sup>94</sup> The League leaders did not mince words and called Fazlul Huq a traitor. Suhrawardy, for instance, in a speech at Noakhali on 24 February 1942 said:

Today why people adore us. You can well imagine that all those who are ready to lay down their lives for their community will be similarly respected and followed. Those who having been driven out of their community or have gone to the side of other religionists will never be adored. Fazlul Huq has now become our minister. The public do not want him. He is being ignored wherever he goes. If the present ministry is not broken and a new ministry not set up then there will no proper administration.<sup>95</sup>

That the tours of the League leaders had the blessings of permanent officials in the secretariat is shown by the account of Muhammad Waliullah who was an active worker of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and accompanied the leaders on their trips.<sup>96</sup> He was entrusted with the responsibility of keeping an account of the tour expenses. He said that once the Police Superintendent of Mymensingh arranged dinner for them anonymously. A number of officials, particularly Commissioners, District Magistrates and Police Superintendents, met Nazimuddin during the course of his tour. Though speeches were delivered in a highly objectionable manner, in most cases no action was taken against the speakers.

The consequences of the League leaders' tours may be

94. A perusal of the issues of January of these two papers would give an idea that both the papers started a crusade against Fazlul Huq and his ministry which the papers termed as 'Shyama-Huq' ministry, 'Haquai-ministry'.

95. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 96/42.

96. Waliullah, n. 8, pp. 388-405.

summarised as below: Firstly, this was the first time when the League leaders together visited different parts of Bengal, not as government spokesmen but as representatives of the party. Secondly, ordinary Muslims in the villages got an opportunity to hear from the leaders themselves the reasons about Fazlul Huq's expulsion from the League. They were particularly convinced when they heard Akram Khan because to them he was the only leader who was not interested in power.

Thanks to the initiative of Suhrawardy, the Muslim League also succeeded in involving the student community in the anti-Fazlul Huq campaign. Hundreds of meetings were organized by the students to mobilise the Muslim public opinion against Fazlul Huq and his ministry. Suhrawardy had to assure British permanent officials that the meetings were not directed against the British power. "At the meetings we advise Muslims to dissociate themselves from the Congress movement. We also make it clear to them that Japanese conquest will be fatal to the Muslims of India".<sup>97</sup>

The new drive also included certain long-term measures. The most important among them was the revitalisation of the organizational set-up. Akram Khan was made president of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League in place of Fazlul Huq.<sup>98</sup> Suhrawardy continued to be its secretary. With the expulsion of some MLAs, there were new additions to the Working Committee and the Council of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. At a meeting on 25 January 1942, the Working Committee of the Provincial League took disciplinary action against the Nawab of Dacca and Hashem Ali Khan. They were expelled from various offices under the League and also from primary membership of the organization. The meeting was presided over by A.R. Siddique. By a resolution the meeting also endorsed the action taken by the Calcutta

97. Suhrawardy's letter dated 29 January 1943 to J.R. Blair, Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal. Home Political File 68/43.

98. Akram Khan took a few days before he decided to snap the link with Fazlul Huq's ministry because his paper *Azad* depended on financial help from the Government. In its first budget the earlier ministry granted Rs. 30,000 to *Azad* in violation of the rules in the hope that it would support the ministry. Waliullah, n. 8, p. 38. *Azad* first started its publication on 31 October 1936, a few months before the provincial elections,

District Muslim League against Syed Badruddoja, a member of the Working Committee, expelling him from membership of the League.

A new trend developed during this time. Whereas the Parliamentary League party in Bengal went under the complete control of Jinnah, and the Working Committee went under the control of Jinnah's trusted followers like M.A.H. Ispahani, Nooruddin and Shahabuddin, the Council of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League developed an independent attitude and started working independently so far as the extra-parliamentary politics of the party was concerned. There were signs of healthy development in the party as the council members felt the need to organize the party at the mass level for the sake of organization, and not as a prop to the ministry as before. Since 1937 all local units acted as supporters of the League ministry and the Government, and the local politics was dominated from Calcutta or by leaders who had their centre of interest in Calcutta. Now for the first time the council members showed determination to organize the party at all levels.

The revitalisation of the Muslim League organization was also reflected in greater attention being given to local grievances. To focus attention on these the Working Committee of the Provincial Muslim League at its meeting in Calcutta on 15-16 July 1942 and in Dacca on 19 July formed an enquiry committee "to investigate the cases of oppression of League workers and Muslim officials and the Muslim public in general". A council of action was formed later to intensify the movement. Another committee was formed on receipt of various allegations that "systematic tyranny is being practised on the Muslim inhabitants of Raipur and Sibpur police stations in Dacca district".<sup>99</sup> The Government investigated into the matter and the report of the Commissioner of Dacca was interesting: "It would appear that the systematic tyranny to which exception has been taken is actually nothing more than the distribution of loan and relief to Hindu victims of last

99. Government of Bengal, Home Confidential File 402/42 (Conl. 1).

year's Muslim oppression in which Muslims exhypothesi cannot share."<sup>100</sup>

The Muslim League also stirred agitation with respect to "flagrant injustice done to the Muslims of Bengal in respect to the appointments in air raid precautions and other services connected with the war by the present Government of Bengal".<sup>101</sup> A council of action with Nurul Huda as secretary was formed at a conference of Muslims in Calcutta. The Governor was asked to intervene in the matter.<sup>102</sup>

Jinnah realised the importance of rendering help to Muslim League leaders in Bengal when they were dislodged from power, and to demonstrate the solidarity of the All India Muslim League with the provincial units. He did what he could at his own level by getting resolutions supporting the Bengal League leaders passed by the Working Committee and the Council of the All-India Muslim League. When the Bengal League leaders requested him to address the Muslim Provincial Conference in Sirajganj he responded readily. He refused to change his programme in order to meet Chiang Kai-shek in Delhi at the latter's request "as it would cause enormous inconvenience to thousands of Bengal Muslims and

100. D.O.F. no. 1933C dated 31 July 1942 from the Commissioner of Dacca to the Secretary, Home. Ibid.

101. *Star of India*, 3 September 1942.

102. It had been repeatedly alleged in the Muslim League press that only Hindus were appointed in air raid precaution services in violation of the Government order about the percentage of Muslims in Government service. (*Azad*, 28 August 1942; *Star of India*, 3 September 1942). This was a major plank in the Muslim League's anti-ministry propaganda. They pointed out that Fazlul Huq's ministry under the influence of the Hindu Mahasabha member was giving all appointments in Calcutta to Hindus. However, the facts of the case were that the appointments were made by the Calcutta Air Raid Precaution Committee composed of 6 European members and one Muslim member, all these in official capacity (Government of Bengal File 519 of 1939) and not a single Hindu member was there. Secondly the members alleged on the floor of Assembly on 26 February, 1942 that the Government had failed to enlist non-official co-operation in air raid precaution work and services (Nalinaksha Sanyal, I.D. Jalan and Kiran Shankar Roy, 26 February 1942, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LXII, no. 2, pp. 399-406) which showed that it was a case of showing official favouritism and not the question of showing favour to Hindus against Muslims under the Fazlul Huq ministry.

League Conference would not be able to proceed without him.”<sup>103</sup>

In a press interview on 13 February at Calcutta Jinnah made clear the reason for his coming to Bengal. “Bengal Muslims must follow League policy fanatically or else they are doomed. They cannot stand on their own legs without whole-heartedly joining the rest of India.” He added: “If any province is going to gain what Muslims have lost and suffered for the last 200 years Bengal stands to gain most for which the rest of Muslims are prepared to suffer and sacrifice where they are in minority.”<sup>104</sup>

“The strengthening of the League organisation demanded”, Jinnah impressed upon the League MLAs in the course of an informal meeting on 17 February 1942 at the residence of Nazimuddin, “that the question of office acceptance should be shelved for two years.”<sup>105</sup> He put emphasis on self-sacrifice by individual League members and regretted that “no Bengal Muslim League leader excluding Maulana Akram Khan has any sacrifice to his credit”. To his dismay he found cabinet politics to be a dominating feature of the Bengal Muslim League policy. If they wanted to break the present cabinet they could do so only by banishing any possible hankering for office, he said.<sup>106</sup>

At the Sirajganj Conference Jinnah reiterated his charge against Fazlul Huq and asked: “Is this not a case of gross betrayal and treachery, not only to the Muslim League, but to Muslim India.”<sup>107</sup> He condemned the ministry as he felt it was out to crush the League movement in Bengal by hampering the League work and said: “If the Governor does not stop this without delay there will arise a situation unparalleled in the history of Bengal during British raj. We are not going to be suppressed or tyrannised by this wretched ministry that

103. From Governor General to the Secretary of State, Telegram no. 27-D/42, dated 16 February 1942. Government of India, Home Political File 17/24/2-Poll. (I).

104. Ibid.

105. Secret Report no. C.B. 29 dated 20 February 1942 from Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta. Home Political File 17/2/42-Poll. (I).

106. Ibid.

107. *Morning News*, 16 February 1942.



does not represent Muslims." The conference passed resolutions demanding fresh provincial elections, reiterating faith in Pakistan and urging the Governor to drive Shyama Prasad Mukherjee out of office for his defiance of the Bihar Government's order in Bhagalpur. Jinnah successfully linked the issue facing the Bengal Muslim League with those of the All India Muslim League.

Whatever the motive behind Jinnah's visit to Bengal, he tellingly demonstrated his popularity when more than 40,000 people turned up to receive him at Howrah station. Jinnah's visit charted the future direction of the League politics in Bengal. It boosted the morale of the students' section of the League and gave them a programme of action. The All Bengal Muslim Students League as well as the Muslim National Guard, a militant section of the League, acquired a new momentum. There also gathered from among the Muslim youth a group of loyal followers of Suhrawardy who later on proved to be a good source of strength to him. District Muslim League National Guard organizations also began to be formed.

From Calcutta, this section spread to the countryside, organizing meetings to mobilise Muslims behind the League movement. A big conference of the All Bengal Muslim Students League was held at Chinsura on 8-9 September 1942 where Suhrawardy delivered the inaugural speech. It adopted resolutions showing that Jinnah had successfully made them shift the focus from issues concerning Bengal Muslims to issues which concerned the All India Muslim League, Jinnah's hegemony over Bengal Muslim politics was completely established. Muslims in Bengal began to assert the claim of Jinnah made to the British to allow him to form the government. The resolution runs as follows :

The session . . . urges upon the Government to concede the demand of the Muslim League and make an immediate declaration from His Majesty's Government to the effect that they will abide by the verdict of the national plebiscite of Muslims after the war about Pakistan issue. . . . The Congress is now on the other side of the barricade. But Congress is not India. The

special session of All Bengal Muslim Students League condemns the government for pursuing a hesitant policy and urges it to call upon Mr. M.A. Jinnah to form a war-time popular Government in cooperation with other parties.<sup>108</sup>

The demand for Pakistan had evidently begun to be vigorously echoed in Bengal. More of it in the next chapter.

108. *Star of India*, 11 September 1942.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE NAZIMUDDIN MINISTRY AND THE PAKISTAN MOVEMENT 1943-46

On 13 April 1943 Governor John Herbert allowed Nazimuddin to form a new ministry with members from the Muslim League only, contrary to the understanding contained in the typed letter of resignation which Fazlul Huq had been made to sign.<sup>1</sup> The Hindu Nationalist Party in the Assembly in a resolution on 13 April regretted that "the Muslim League party declines to work with Muslim groups who do not belong to the Muslim League although such groups were willing to join an all-party ministry" and pointed out this attitude of the Muslim League was inconsistent "with the declared policy of the H.E. the Governor".<sup>2</sup> This showed that the Governor and permanent officials were set against Fazlul Huq and his ministry. Nazimuddin, however, on the same day extended an invitation to the Hindus to help him to constitute a representative and strong Government. Though the Muslim ministers and the parliamentary secretaries were taken only from the Muslim League, several Hindus were also included in the ministry<sup>3</sup> and the ministerial group formed on 24 April 1943 was called Bengal Coalition. The claim of its being a representative ministry was, however, untenable for two reasons : Of the seven Muslim ministers two, Nazimuddin and his brother Shahabuddin, and one parliamentary secretary,

1. The letter of resignation which Fazlul Huq signed ran as follows : "Understanding that there is a probability of the formation of a ministry representative of most of the parties in the event of my resignation, I hereby tender my resignation of my office as minister in the sincere hope that this will prove to be in the best interests of the people of Bengal." A.K. Fazlul Huq, *Bengal Today* (Calcutta, 1944), p. 37 ; and also his statement "Why I resigned" on the floor of Assembly on 5 July 1943, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 5 July 1943, vol. LXV, p. 60.

2. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 14 April 1943.

3. There were 13 ministers and 17 parliamentary secretaries in the new government.

Nasrullah, were from Dacca Nawab family.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, out of total 115 members in the ministerial coalition, Europeans excluded, 13 ministers and 17 secretaries had been kept by jobs.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Fazlul Huq was allowed only 11 ministers and one parliamentary secretary and his repeated requests for an additional person in the cabinet were turned down by the Governor.

There was not much activity in the legislative and administrative fields during the period of Nazimuddin premiership except that the ministry had to tackle a severe famine in late 1943 when people died in thousands. According to the government report 1.5 million people died in famine<sup>6</sup> while according to a contemporary estimate 3.5 million people died and it affected severely the life of 20 million out of 60 million people in Bengal.<sup>7</sup> The figures of death probably did not reveal the full gravity of the calamity. In the famine-stricken area 10 per cent of the people or an estimated 1.2 million to 1.5 million men, women and children became beggars.<sup>8</sup> Another 6 million people, including 2.7 million land-labourers, 1.5 million poor peasants, 1.5 million country-industrial

4. The party position in the Assembly was as follows : *Government Supporters* : (1) Muslim League—79, (2) Bengal Swarajya Party—5, (3) Bengal Legislative Scheduled Caste Party—20, (4) European group—25, (5) Labour Party—2, (6) Independent Party—4, (7) Indian Christian—1, (8) Anglo-Indian—4, Total—140. *Opposition* : (1) Progressive Party—24, (2) Krishak Praja Party—17, (3) Nationalists—13, (4) Congress (Official)—25, (5) Congress (Bose group)—19, (6) Indian Christian—1, (7) Independents—1, (8) Scheduled Castes—8. Total 108.

5. Ironically Jinnah earlier in his presidential speech at the Bengal Provincial Muslim League Conference at Sirajgunj in February 1942 had hurled this same allegation against Fazlul Huq's second ministry. He said that 17 whips and "not less than 17 secretaries" to be appointed would mean that the total number of officials and ministers came to something like 45 or 50 out of 119 supporters of Fazlul Huq who "had been kept by providing jobs. This was the position of the Ministry in Bengal." *Star of India*, 16 February 1942. The allegation was, of course, baseless.

6. *The reports of Famine Enquiry Commission under the presidency of Sir John Woodhead* (Delhi, 1944) (commonly known as *Woodhead Committee Report*), vol. V, p. 1274.

7. (Late) Bhabani Sen, *Bhanganer Mukhe Bangla* (Calcutta, 1945), p. 10.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

workers and 25,000 poor school teachers, were reduced to a very similar status.<sup>9</sup>

It is futile to apportion blame for this great famine. Neither the Fazlul Huq ministry nor the Muslim League ministry created the conditions for it, though each held the other responsible for the catastrophe.<sup>10</sup> As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the food shortage was to the tune of 5 crore maunds of rice in 1943, not such a big shortfall as to create so great a calamity. The shortage was aggravated by the war-time removal of rice from the coastal areas of Bengal and destruction of country boats as part of the denial policy. Besides other measures necessitating stocking for the military and para-military organizations, procurement by the Government and its agents encouraged the profiteer and blackmarketeer to hoard. There was also a failure of the Nazimuddin Government to pursue an effective policy of import and proper distribution of rice.<sup>11</sup>

In fairness to Fazlul Huq, it must be said that he had warned the Governor, in his letter dated 2 August 1942, about the acute food shortage which could result from a reckless pursuit of the denial policy.<sup>12</sup> Fazlul Huq had not only disagreed with the Governor on these basic policies but had

9. Ibid., p. 10.

10. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee brought out a book *Panchaser Manantar* (Fifty's famine) (Calcutta 1350 B.S./1943) wherein he accused the Muslim League Government, particularly the Civil Supplies Department under Suhrawardy, as being responsible for the famine. On the other hand, Muhammad Habibullah Bahar, an important Muslim League leader, wrote an article in *Millat* (a weekly in Calcutta, 1st year, no. 14, March 1946) placing the entire responsibility on the 'Shyama-Huq' ministry. Fazlul Huq put the responsibility squarely on the government agents who were engaged by the Nazimuddin ministry to procure food grains. In his memorandum submitted to the Famine Enquiry Commission Fazlul Huq maintained that the famine was principally due to the reckless method of purchase in the mofussil through monopolists as adopted by the Nazimuddin ministry. *Reports of Famine Enquiry Commission*, n. 6, vol. 1, p. 276.

11. Why Nazimuddin failed can be argued but it is a fact that when he accepted office in April 1943 the signs of famine were quite visible for the Government to take prompt action.

12. Please see Appendix VI for the letter and discussion in Chapter V, pp. 148-50.

expressed himself strongly despite his insecure position in the legislature. In contrast, Nazimuddin had a secure position and the blessings of the Governor and the European members and it was during his premiership that the famine visited Bengal. Naturally his ministry had the responsibility to meet the situation by importing rice and following a proper distribution system. During Nazimuddin's rule the sole agency for Government's procurement was given to Ispahani and Co.<sup>13</sup> Whereas during Fazlul Huq's time the Governor, though he initially gave the sole agency to Ispahani, had later agreed to the appointment of certain other agents suggested by the ministry.

The huge toll taken by the famine shook the people's confidence in Nazimuddin's Government and made it unpopular.<sup>14</sup> However this unpopularity was considerably redressed among Muslims, particularly among its articulate sections, by Suhrawardy's untiring efforts to provide one time meals through gruel kitchens (*langarkhana*) to famine-stricken people in Calcutta. Though the scheme was started on behalf of the Government it succeeded because of Suhrawardy's efforts and therefore came to be largely associated with his name. It further enhanced his prestige and leadership capacity.

## II

Indeed, surprising though it may seem, in spite of the great famine, the period of Nazimuddin's ministry is notable for the deep roots acquired by the Pakistan movement in Bengal. The swiftness with which the movement gathered momentum during this period makes it necessary to search out the driving forces behind it.

In Bengal the idea of Pakistan captured the imagination of Muslims not out of any feeling of religious insecurity but because it assured them a system of administration, economy

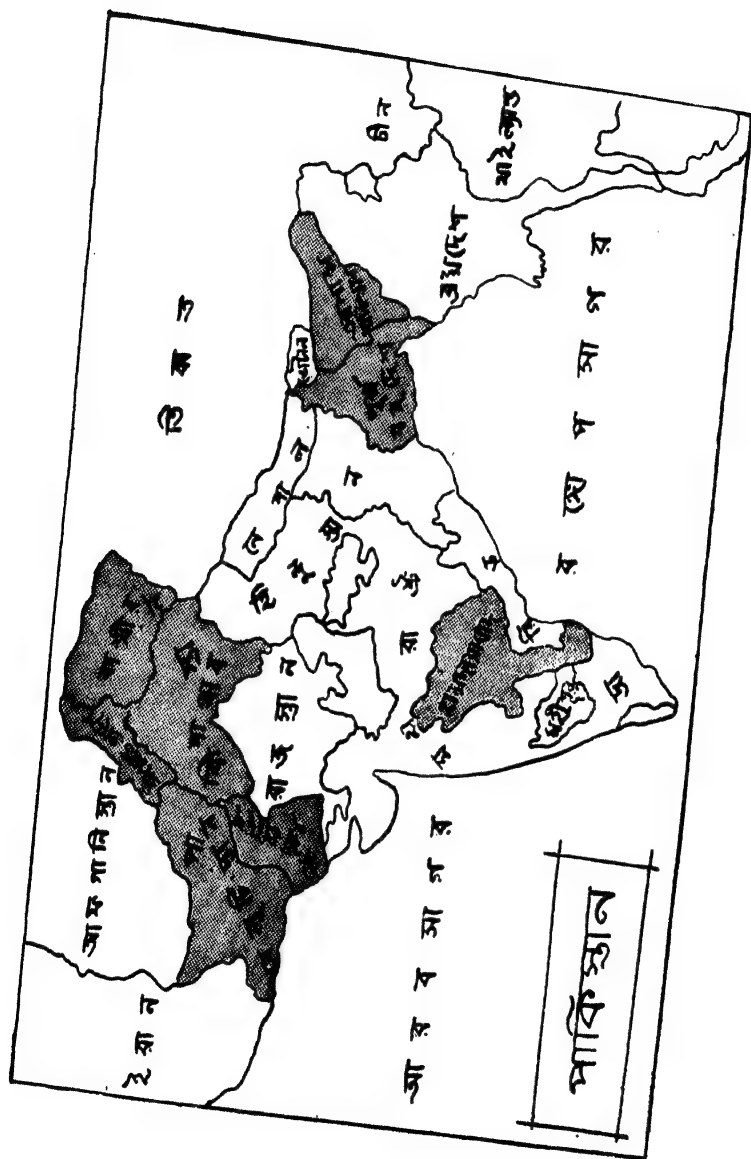
13. Statement of Suhrawardy on the food situation on the floor of the Assembly, 5 July 1943, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. LXV, p. 89.

14. Humayun Kabir, "Muslim Politics 1942-47" in C.H. Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright, ed., *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives 1935-47* (London, 1970), p. 393.

and polity free of Hindu competition and the hope of establishment of a Muslim national state in Eastern India. However, as Muslims of Bengal were not prepared to be dominated by Hindus, the majority of them were also not thinking of sharing power with Muslims from other parts of India. The Pakistan movement in Bengal during the period 1943-45, therefore, aimed at achieving an independent sovereign state comprising Bengal and Assam and at democratizing and making the party broad-based so that the aristocratic leadership did not control the destiny of the Muslim masses in the region at the time of the establishment of Pakistan. Viewed in this context this period witnessed the formulation of definite attitudes and ideas of Bengali Muslims to the Pakistan demand of the All-India Muslim League and the infighting in League politics.

As for the ideological basis of the Pakistan movement in Bengal, it can be said that the movement was not the handiwork of the League alone, though its contribution was no doubt the greatest. It was a joint movement of the League, Muslim literati, youth and the masses. Not only did Muslim intelligentsia accord their fullest support to the movement but they also gave a concrete shape to the Pakistan ideal and cleared the ambiguity in its conception. However, the point of note here is that it was the ideal of 'Purba-Pakistan' in Bengal and Assam on the basis of the Lahore resolution that was the article of faith with Muslims in Bengal. The leading Muslim journals of that period carried a number of articles by well-known writers which gave vent to this view. In an article on "Pakistan and Soviet Union" Zahur Hossain categorically said :

That the 'Musalman chasi' (meaning Muslim peasant) of Bengal can make friendship with 'Kabuli Mahajan' (meaning money-lender from Kabul) can only be imagined by those who do not have any connection with the soil of the country. Some time it is said that Urdu is the mother-language of the Indian Musalmans. But the leaders of Pakistan movement in Bengal have clearly said that the state-language of 'Purba-Pakistan' will be Bengali and not Urdu. That Peshawar and Chittagong





can not be brought under one state, Pakistan idea accepts this truth only.<sup>15</sup>

In his book *Pakistan*, Mujibur Rahman Khan, a leading journalist and well-known radical leader of Bengal,<sup>16</sup> said :

... the different nations and the different provinces of India should get self-determination. The Dravidians in the South want to establish a state there. The Muslims of India want to establish two independent states in the north-west and eastern India. This demand of the Muslims is known as the Pakistan proposal.<sup>17</sup>

The book carries a map (see photostat copy, p. 177) which clearly showed the zones in the west as Pakistan and the zones in the east (Bengal and Assam) as Purba-Pakistan.

The Purba-Pakistan Renaissance Society in Calcutta and the Purba-Pakistan Sahitya Sangsad at Dacca were established around this time by the Muslim intelligentsia of these two cities.<sup>18</sup> Most members of the first society were, however, associated with the Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Samity (established 1926). The ideals on which the Renaissance Society was based were (1) to give literary and cultural shape to the ideal of Pakistan by relating it to the way of life, outlook and tradition of people of Bengal and Assam by arranging talks, debates and seminars on Pakistan and by publishing articles, essays and books on it, and (2) to develop Muslim national culture by arranging cultural functions and congregations during Muslim festivals.

Both the societies held annual sammelans from 1943 onwards, and a number of articles were read on Pakistan and aspirations of Bengali Muslims which were subsequently

15. Zahur Hossain, "Pakistan and Soviet Union", in Mujibur Rahman Khan, *Pakistan* (Calcutta, 1954), pp. 66-67.

16. He was also the convener of the Purba Pakistan Renaissance Society, Calcutta. *Azad*, 28 March 1943.

17. Mujibur Rahman, n. 15, pp. 52-53.

18. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, *Atit Diner Smriti* (Dacca, 1968), pp. 225-34. He was one of the founder members of the first society and presided over the inauguration ceremony of the second at Dacca in 1943. He was a well-known journalist and editor of *Azad* from 1942 onwards.

published in *Azad and Mohammadi*. While presiding over the session in 1944, Abul Mansur Ahmed said :

Religion and culture are not the same thing. Religion transgresses the geographical boundary but 'tamaddun' (meaning culture) cannot go beyond the geographical boundary. Rather flourishes within depending on that 'sima' (geographical limit). Here only lies the differences between Purba-Pakistan and Pakistan. For this reason the people of Purba Pakistan are a different nation from the people of the other provinces of India and from the 'religious brothers' of Pakistan.<sup>19</sup>

While emphasising the natural and geographical peculiarity of Bengal and Assam, the president of the cultural section of this conference said :

The natural and physical individuality of Bengal and Assam cannot be seen in the entire geographical India and stands unique when placed against the Muslim world (Muslim Jahan). The rivers and rivulets, the ponds and swamp lands of Bengal and Assam are nowhere in India, not even in the whole Muslim world. The culture of this place is based on this individuality and therefore is totally different.<sup>20</sup>

In his presidential address at the Sammelan at Dacca in Pakistan 1943, Abul Kalam Shamsuddin said that the "ideal of Pakistan does not give a call for self-awakening in the field of politics only but it inspires self-awakening in the field of literature and culture also. The literature and culture of Purba Pakistan should portray the life and tradition of the people of this land."<sup>21</sup>

That the Pakistan movement in Bengal was viewed as a political movement of Muslims for democratic rights and tenets was clear from a number of writings in the fortnightly

19. *Mohammadi*, Sravan-Bhadra, 1351 B.S. (August-September 1944).

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid, Falgun 1349 B.S. (March 1943).

*Pakistan*,<sup>22</sup> published by Muslim students of Dacca University. In a series of illuminating articles in the *Star of India* under the title "Divide and Develop", Fazlur Rahman (Dacca University) opined that achievement of Pakistan would allow the majority people of this area to advance their political and economic interests and develop their respective culture and literature.<sup>23</sup> The major emphasis of the literary works of Bengali Muslims was on the theme that they were not only different from Hindus, they were also different from Muslims in other provinces. What they meant by *Bangali Muslim Sahitya Sanskriti* had been analysed by speeches and papers read at the sammelans organized by the Purba Pakistan Renaissance Society. These pointed out that Bengali Muslim writers instead of imitating Hindus and writing on material from Bengali Hindu society and culture should develop Muslim *sahitya*. These should portray Muslim life, spirit and society in Bengal and should be more down to earth and based on the way of life and tradition in the villages of Bengal.

Interestingly the Muslim League members in the Government also felt the same way. While writing to Viceroy Wavell, R.G. Casey, the then Governor of Bengal, commented how Nazimuddin's mind was working on the Pakistan idea. A rather long quotation from the letter would reveal that even Nazimuddin, a staunch supporter of Jinnah and the All-India Muslim League, had no misgivings in his mind, till the issue got clouded by the developments during the year preceding partition, about what Pakistan in the Eastern Zone meant to them. Casey wrote :

Since the Muslim League conference at Lahore on the 28th July (1944) the executives of the Muslim League in Bengal have been exercising their minds on the subject. Nazimuddin told me a few days ago that he was just on the point of writing to Jinnah telling him where they stood with regard to the boundaries of North-Eastern Pakistan. They want Bengal (less the Burdwan Division)

22. It was a fortnightly journal edited by Fazlur Rahman of Dacca University. Also see article of Sajjad Zahir, "Muslim League O Bharater Swadhinata", *Pakistan*, 7 February 1944.

23. *Star of India*, 11 and 25 January 1946.

all of Assam and a part of Purnea district in Bihar continuous with North-West Bengal. Nazimuddin tells me that they calculated that the combined area would give them a majority of 58 per cent of Muslims in place of 51 per cent if only all Bengal and all Assam were to be included. He tells me that the Muslims bred faster than the Hindus, and that the 58 per cent would reach 60 per cent and more within a relatively few years. He went on to say that they believe that, once this N.-E. Pakistan was established, there would be no one more keen about it than the Hindus within its borders—and that he believed it possible that the Burdwan Division might come into N.-E. Pakistan in due course. He says that Centre has always been controlled by Bombay, Madras and the U.P., and that these provinces dominated Indian policy, to the disadvantage of Bengal. He says that it is this fact, together with the distressing intolerance towards the Muslims that the Congress Hindu Governments (in what are now the Section 93 Provinces) displayed, that has made them insistent on getting a sovereign state in N.-E. India that will be independent of the rest of India.<sup>24</sup>

The above, from a non-Bengali Muslim who detested centre's (dominated by Bombay, U.P. and Madras) control over Bengal and wanted sovereign Pakistan state in Bengal and Assam, leaves no doubt about Bengal Muslims' idea about Pakistan.

Not only did these spell in clearer terms the aspirations of Bengali Muslims behind the Pakistan demand, they also differentiated the Pakistan movement in Bengal from that in other Muslim majority provinces.

### III

However the credit for extensively spreading the Pakistan movement in Bengal goes to the League party leadership and

24. Mr. Casey to field Marshal Viscount Wavell dated 11 Sept. 1944, L/RE PEJ/5/151: ff 119-20, N. Mansergh, *The Transfer of Power 1942-7*, Vol. V (London, 1974) pp. 29-30.

not to its parliamentary leadership represented by Nazimuddin, Shahabuddin and Ispahani. From 1943 onwards parliamentary politics ceased to be the rallying point of the Muslim League consolidation in Bengal. A shift of emphasis towards the party took place when Jinnah ruled that any office-bearer of the organization should not hold a parliamentary post or a post in the government. Suhrawardy accordingly resigned from secretaryship of the Muslim League in Bengal.<sup>25</sup>

This change in organizational leadership took place at the annual general meeting of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League held in Calcutta on 6-8 November 1943. That the fight for leadership between Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy had become conspicuous by this time is evident from the election of the office-bearers of the provincial party.<sup>26</sup> While in the ministry Nazimuddin outwitted Suhrawardy by taking more of his men, in the provincial organization Suhrawardy did not allow control of the party to slip out of his hand, though he resigned from secretaryship. None of the business magnates of Calcutta, like Haji Adamji Daud and M.A. Ispahani, who were vice-presidents earlier, could get themselves elected. Although Abul Hashim was Suhrawardy's choice his election as secretary was equally acceptable to Nazimuddin. Hashim's criticism of Suhrawardy (as Civil Supplies Minister) gave Nazimuddin the hope that this man would hold independent opinions, even *vis-a-vis* Suhrawardy. Moreover, all the assistant secretaries elected were from Suhrawardy's group (except Khairul Anam Khan who was the son of the president, Akram Khan) and Suhrawardy also got elected all the 100 members he selected to the Council of the All India Muslim League from Bengal. This marked the beginning of infighting in the Bengal Muslim League leadership.

Abul Hashim had a clean slate as far as politics was concerned. Son of Abul Kasem, a popular political figure of Burdwan, he started a new phase in the affairs of the Provincial

25. This decision Jinnah announced through a statement. *Star of India*, 14 September 1943.

26. There was a move on the part of the followers of Nazimuddin to postpone the question of election to next day as they were outnumbered by Suhrawardy's supporters, but the house voted to hold the election on the same day. *Star of India*, 8 November 1943.

Muslim League. He brought about fundamental changes in its composition which democratized the party. Before 1943 the Muslim League in different parts of Bengal had existed rather as a pocket organization of the founder-members who were mostly Knights, Nawabs and other high-placed persons who never believed that the British would leave India.<sup>27</sup> Their political orientation was therefore to maintain the *status quo*. They never desired to make the party itself broadbased nor were they capable of doing so. Their purpose was served so long as they could organize a big gathering to welcome a visiting minister or when the League wanted to hold a meeting. Except in places like Pabna and Noakhali where communal antagonism between Muslims and Hindus came to the fore, the party did not have a regular band of workers. While speaking at the Council meeting in Calcutta on 20 March 1944, Abul Hashim said that in the course of his tours he had noticed the tendency of the local leaders everywhere not to encourage proper organization because they feared that if these organizations were decentralized their own leadership might be eliminated.<sup>28</sup>

The method Abul Hashim adopted was to make direct appeal to the people. He toured different parts of north, west and eastern Bengal and established direct relationship with workers of the different districts. There was a difference between his tours and those of the former secretary, Suhrawardy, during 1937-43. Suhrawardy's visits were either for building support for the ministry or for mobilizing opposition to Fazlul Huq. In contrast, Abul Hashim's tours were undertaken for strengthening the Muslim League organization.

This posed a challenge to the established *status quo* leadership in Muslim politics in different places. This also encouraged

27. The author's interview with late Abul Hashim, Dacca, 19 July 1972. Abul Hashim was Secretary of Bengal Provincial Muslim League from November 1943 until Partition though due to his poor sight he was on leave for one year towards the end of this period. In 1972 (July) he gave an exclusive interview to the author dictating a note on the crucial events in Bengal politics (1943-47) which ran into 65 pages. Later on towards the end of 1974 his memoirs *In Retrospection* came out incorporating those views.

28. *Star of India*, 21 March 1944.

the youth and progressive forces in local Muslim politics to join the League. Since the League was constituted in every place through election of office bearers, scope for dissent was available within the party itself.

Hashim prepared a draft manifesto elaborating the ideals of the League and declaring in categorical terms the moral, social, economic and political objectives of Pakistan.<sup>29</sup> The Bengal League of all the Provincial League organizations was the first to set before Muslims the objectives of Pakistan in clear and positive terms. It also strove to make the movement look progressive. In the preamble of the manifesto the necessity to lay down in clear terms the aims and objectives of the Muslim League had been stressed with a view to clearing the misgivings in the minds of non-Muslims as well as to enthuse the Muslim youth and public.<sup>30</sup> More importantly, the preamble emphasized that Pakistan had a deep link with the life and conditions in Eastern Bengal making Pakistan the East Bengali Muslims' independence creed.

The draft manifesto no doubt also put emphasis on the values and ideals of Islam, enjoining on the Muslim League to enforce the law of *Shariat* in Muslim society and to encourage and rejuvenate Islamic culture through the study of the history of art, music and folk songs of East Pakistan, but nowhere was it mentioned that Pakistan would be an Islamic State. The important objectives set forth in this were: (1) equality before law; (2) rights of citizenship; (3) equal opportunities irrespective of creed, caste and class; (4) right to education; (5) nationalization of the important jute industry and elimination of the vested interests; and (6) the specification of the rights of labourers, peasants and artisans.

Abul Hashim was a great orator. He attracted youth who were also influenced by his leftist leanings. He distributed membership of the Council of the Provincial Muslim League equally among the districts, including Calcutta. Each was to

29. The author's interview with Abul Hashim, Dacca, 9 and 11 July 1972. Also quoted in Badruddin Umar (he is son of Abul Hashim), *Purba Banglar Bhasa Andolan O Tatkalin Rajniti* (Dacca, 1970), pp. 214-15.

30. Draft Manifesto of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League by Abul Hashim, published by Shamsuddin Ahmad, Purba Pakistan Publishing House.

elect 25 members. Earlier the number of Council members from a district depended on its Muslim population, and Calcutta had maximum weightage. The result was that the control of the organization by the Calcutta League leaders was significantly reduced as was the importance of Calcutta in League politics. The number of members nominated by the president to the working committee was reduced from 10 to 4 which meant that out of 24 members (excluding three ex-officio members) as many as 20 would be elected. He abolished the posts of vice-presidents and assistant secretaries which, though mostly decorative, did give some say to undesirable elements in the working of the organization. The far-reaching effect of this move was that party politics and parliamentary politics were effectively separated, with stress on the former which controlled the latter.

The middle class Muslims now developed an interest in politics based on concrete aims and objectives, which Hashim's powerful oratory articulated. The younger generation which had earlier found the parliamentary leaders completely indifferent to the people were enthused by the new leadership.<sup>31</sup> In February 1944 Abul Hashim visited Narayanganj to preside over a students' conference. In his speech he talked about the obstacles in the political life of Muslims and said that he felt it his duty to liberate the middle class people from three forces which were controlling League politics. These were : first, the reactionary politics of Ahsan Manzil (the palace of the Nawab of Dacca) which was not allowing the middle class Muslim leadership to shape itself ; second, the publicity of Muslim League politics which had been mortgaged to Akram Khan's *Azad*; and third, the treasury of the League which was controlled by Ispahanis of the Muslim business community of Calcutta. He declared that he would set up a party within the party to enrol common people into the Muslim League. He also declared that he would fight capitalism, feudalism and superstition and give Islam a new interpretation as a force in a democratic movement.

31. The author's interview with Kamruddin Ahmad, Dacca, 21 July 1972. He was an important youth League leader in Dacca.



Hashim's speech had instantaneous results. The younger generation flocked around him. Shortly afterwards he conducted elections to the Dacca District League and defeated the Dacca Nawabs in their own den. The Dacca District League during 1937-43 was a powerful body but was under the guidance of parliamentary leadership and did not extend its activities beyond this role.

Abul Hashim's activities, limited to the party, meant a big challenge within the Muslim League to established leadership, both parliamentary as represented by Nazimuddin and the Calcutta non-Bengali business community, and the organizational as represented by Akram Khan, and a number of East Bengal MLAs who were interested, like Akram Khan, in maintaining the *status quo*. To Suhrawardy, who was the uncrowned king of the poorer sections of Muslims of Calcutta and the suburbs, it did not matter much, as it did not effect his position in any way. Rather he extended his willing support to Abul Hashim. Since Abul Hashim himself was interested in projecting his leadership inside the party only, Suhrawardy stood a better chance of leading the parliamentary wing. Instead of opposing Abul Hashim, therefore, Suhrawardy allowed his name to be associated with his new moves. This gave him, on the one hand, a wonderful band of young committed workers and, on the other, helped him to dislodge Nazimuddin from leadership, which was not otherwise possible as the latter had the blessings of Jinnah through Ispahani.

The effect of Abul Hashim's organizational activities was that the Muslim League was made a progressive, democratic and broad-based organization in Bengal. A new image of the League as the political movement of the Muslim majority in Bengal was itself in the making.

#### IV

The two important centres of student and youth activities were Calcutta and Dacca during this period.<sup>32</sup> As in the

32. The author's interviews with following students who were connected with Calcutta politics: Nooruddin Ahmed. Barisal, 8 July 1972; Kazi Gulam Mahbub, 3 July 1972; Moazzem Choudhury, Sylhet, Secretary, Calcutta Muslim Students League, 3 July 1972; Mirza Golam Hafiz, 18 June, 1, 2 and 22 July 1972; Saidur Rahman (Matron, Becker Hostel),

Provincial League organization, the leadership of Abul Hashim put new life in the youth faction of the Muslim League when he became the secretary in 1943.

Earlier the student and youth politics was only a part of parliamentary politics and after the Muslim League ministry came to power in 1937 Calcutta was its centre. In the beginning there were two organizations, namely, the All-Bengal Muslim Students Association and the All-India Students Federation (Bengal branch) in which there were a number of Muslim students. The president and secretary of the former were A. Waseque and Abu Syed Chaudhury.<sup>33</sup>

Towards the end of 1938 there developed a strong opposition to Waseque's leadership and a section of students broke away and formed the All-India Muslim Students Federation with Shamsur Rahman as secretary and A. Majid as president. In 1939, however, both the organizations merged into All India Muslim Students League and the Bengal branch was called All Bengal Muslim Students League. Waseque still continued to be its president and Sadequr Rahman its secretary.

During the Muslim Students League's convention held in Chinsura in 1942, Waseque was removed and Sadequr Rahman became the president; Anowar Hussain (of the 24 Parganas District) became the secretary. When Anowar fell ill Nooruddin Ahmad became acting secretary towards the end of 1942. This was the set-up of the All Bengal Muslim Students League when Abul Hashim became the secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League.

Calcutta continued to remain the nerve centre of student and youth politics for two main reasons. First, Calcutta had a status-image as a centre of learning. The University of

11 July 1972; Dilwar Hussain, Jessore, 20 July 1972; Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, 19 July 1972; Kazi Golam Mustfa (he was Editor, *Bangladesh Observer*, Dacca in 1972), 19 July 1972.

The author's interview with the student leaders connected with Dacca politics: Kamruddin Ahmad, 21 July 1972; Professor A. Aziz (Head of the Department of International Relations, Dacca University), 30 June 1972 and 19 July 1972; Khandokar Mushtaque Ahmad, 21 July 1972; Professor Abdur Razaque (Head, Political Science, Dacca University), 13 July 1972; Tajuddin Ahmed (first Prime Minister, Bangladesh), 9 July 1972.

33. He was the President of Bangladesh till 1973.

Dacca was yet to acquire the status enjoyed by Calcutta University. Second, Calcutta was still the centre of the existing power complex, and had a pull of its own.

In Calcutta Islamia College and its Becker hostel were the centres of political activity in that all future political workers were supplied by these two places of Muslim student concentration. According to Saidur Rahman, Superintendent of Becker Hostel as well as an active Muslim League leader, the Pakistan movement was fought in the Becker Hostel.<sup>34</sup> I. Zuberi, Principal, Islamia College, and he patronized and directed the student movement from Becker Hostel. Besides, there were two other Muslim student and youth hostels—Carmichael and Tailor Hostel. Both were cosmopolitan in character where university students doing M.A. or Law and also employed Muslim youth used to stay.

In contrast, the nature of the student politics in Dacca was quite different. The Dacca District League was under the control of the Nawab family. In Dacca, relations between Hindus and Muslims were quite strained and there used to be riots almost every year. There was thus a polarisation in student politics between Hindu students and Muslim students though the motivation was neither power nor pro/anti-ministry feelings. Rather from 1941-42 a trend became very strong among Muslim students and youth of Dacca to start a Muslim students party which should remain out of the official League party and the official Muslim Students League which was a part of the Nawab family set-up. In early 1942 this section formed All Bengal Muslim Students Federation, Dacca branch, with Nazir Ahmed as president, Shamsul Huq as vice-president and Khandokar Mushtaq Ahmed as secretary. It had the blessings of Kamruddin Ahmad, a Muslim League youth leader in Dacca who acted as a bridge between the older politicians and the progressive student leaders. In the Dacca University Students League, Badruddin A. Siddique and Farid Ahmed were important leaders. The other important student and youth leaders of the progressive section in Dacca politics were Kazi Zahurul Islam, Mohammad Toha and Sardar Fazlul Karim.

34. The author's interview with Saidur Rahman, Dacca, 11 July 1972.

Elections to the All-Bengal Muslim Students League were held in December 1944. Till then Nooruddin had acted as secretary in the place of Anowar Hossain who fell ill. However, Anowar Hossain recovered and again joined active student politics. The elections took place at the annual meeting held in Kushtia on 31 December 1944. Anowar Hossains did not contest but helped to get Shah Azizur Rahman elected as secretary.

From the Kushtia election onwards, the differences between the Shah Azizur Rahman group (followers of Nazimuddin in the legislature and of Akram Khan in the party) and the Nooruddin-Moazzem group (followers of Suhrawardy in the legislature and of Abul Hashim in the party) became rather sharp. The latter section swelled the Calcutta District Students League which was properly formed in 1944 with Nurul Alam as president and Moazzem as secretary. The All Bengal Muslim Students League remained under the control of the Shah Azizur Rahman group. The infighting in the provincial League politics was thus carried among the students, and quite in the open. However, no other general meeting or election of the Bengal Muslim Students League was held till partition in spite of repeated requests by students from all over the province.

This trend in Calcutta student politics (both of the Bengal Students League and the Calcutta Students League) influenced Muslim student organizations in different districts and towns all over Bengal and brought a division in most of them between pro-Nazimuddin elements and pro-Suhrawardy-Hashim elements.<sup>35</sup> However, the motives in joining these two factions were not always the same. In Jessore, where there was no Muslim zamindar there was no zamindari politics either. The students, therefore, stayed with the old leadership who, in their eyes, was the true representative of the All-India Muslim League.<sup>36</sup>

Thus when Abul Hashim became secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League he turned the gaze of Muslim

35. The president of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, Akram Khan, being ill did not take very active part in politics and spent most of the time in Modhupur, a health resort.

36. The author's interview with Dilwar Hussain, Dacca, 20 July 1972.

students and youth from parliamentary politics to the party.<sup>37</sup> This coincided with the strategy of Jinnah who wanted to make the party supreme so that all the divergent elements in Muslim politics all over India and also the different elements in provincial politics could be successfully merged under one platform. Abul Hashim sought to utilize students and youth for attaining the broader objective of spreading the ideal of Pakistan in the villages of Bengal and to divert their energies to constructive work as well as to the student movement.

In the Bengal famine, Muslim students of Calcutta became very active and helped to run the 'gruel-kitchens'.<sup>38</sup> During the all India postal strike in early 1946 Muslim students of Calcutta under the guidance of the Calcutta District Students League extended their active support. The students also took active part in the movement regarding the Indian National Army (INA) trial in November 1945 as also on Rashid Ali Day on 11 February 1946. Abdus Samad was a front rank leader of the Students Federation.

The Muslim National Guards formed in 1942 played an important role in spreading the message of the Muslim League. This organization of Muslim youth was a brain-child of Jinnah—a device to offset regional or provincial pulls in League politics. The aim was to get a disciplined volunteer corps to work for the party under an all-India leadership. Jinnah knew that provincial League politics, particularly in the Muslim majority areas, unaffected as they were by minority interests, was subject to the cross-currents of provincial politics and could endanger the all-India character of the League. A rival organization, he felt, could act as a check on the provincial organization and could also balance the leadership struggle among the two factions. It could be used to dislodge the local influential people, mullahs and maulvis from the leadership. It had a separate constitution and its all-India chief was called *Salar-e-Ala* and the provincial chief *Salar-e-Suba*. The charge of the Guards was entrusted to individuals appointed by Jinnah. Nawabzada Siddique Ali Khan was the first *Salar-e-Ala*.

37. The author's interview with Moazzem Choudhury, 3 July, Mirza Golam Hafiz, 1, 2 July, Tajuddin Ahmad, 9 July 1972.

38. The author's interview with Nooruddin, 6 July; Mirza Golam Hafiz, 22 July, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, 19 July 1972.

In Bengal Suhrawardy declared in 1942 that he would organize at least one corps of Muslim National Guards in each village of the province. His position as the League secretary gave him an edge over Nazimuddin in this regard. The *Salar-e-Suba* in Bengal was I. Muhazer and the secretary Kazi Zahurul Huq. Bengal was divided into two zones and put under two deputy leaders. Calcutta and Burdwan were controlled by Zahiruddin and Eastern Bengal by Mirza Golam Hafiz. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the leader of the Gopalganj sub-divisional Muslim National Guards. The Guards became an ally of the Suhrawardy-Hashim group and were disliked and feared by Nazimuddin-Akram Khan group.<sup>39</sup>

The Muslim National Guards, besides serving as a volunteer force at Muslim League conferences, played an important role during the 1946 provincial elections in Bengal. Thousands of them went to Assam and attended the Dhubri Conference organized by Maulana Bhashani in April 1947 during the movement against the 'line system' in Assam. During the referendum in Sylhet in 1947, 4,000 to 5,000 Muslim National Guards went to Sylhet to work for the Muslim League, where it was not strong compared to the Jamait Ulama-e-Hind under Maulana Madni.

The Muslim National Guards in Bengal gradually emerged as a militant front of the Muslim League and assumed an aggressive role. It was in the vanguard in the Pakistan movement.

## V

The friction among the Bengal Muslim League leaders brought division among the Muslim MLAs. To Jinnah, Nazimuddin was more dependable rather than Suhrawardy. This preference of Jinnah, while it explained to some extent Nazimuddin's continuance in parliamentary leadership, was at the same time the cause for resentment among some of the Bengal League leaders. Suhrawardy was unhappy and he never attended sessions of the All-India Muslim League after 1941.

39. Immediately after assuming Chief Ministership of East Bengal on partition, Nazimuddin declared the Muslim National Guards organization as illegal.

The division of the Bengal League into pro-Nazimuddin and pro-Suhrawardy factions was to some extent based on the varying commitment to the all-India League policy and to the person of Jinnah. Persons highly committed to both were in the pro-Nazimuddin group.

The fact that the working committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League took one month after the September 1944 Gandhi-Jinnah talks before passing a resolution expressing confidence in Jinnah's stand<sup>40</sup> shows considerable division among the Bengal League ranks. None of the Bengal League leaders besides the executive committee of the Calcutta League came forward to condemn the appointment of the "Conciliation Committee" by Tej Bahadur Sapru in 1944. As was well-known, the Calcutta League was totally under the control of the pro-Jinnah Nazimuddin-Akram Khan faction.

Suhrawardy, whose claim for leadership was twice rejected by Jinnah in 1941 and 1943, had to concentrate on the party. His association with Abul Hashim, however, offset Nazimuddin's influence in parliamentary politics. The factor which put Nazimuddin in power was, that he was closer to British officials in Bengal as well as Jinnah. Obviously M. A. H. Ispahani, who was the trusted man of Jinnah in Bengal and who had also good relations with the Governor as well as the European community, preferred Nazimuddin's leadership all these years. Liaquat Ali Khan was also more inclined towards Nazimuddin than any other Bengal League leader. This guaranteed them control of League politics at the provincial level, particularly in Calcutta.

By 1945, however, the situation had changed. Abul Hashim had already made the provincial party broadbased and its new council and working committee had done away with control by the Calcutta League leaders. Secondly, with the end of the war, the British necessity of a docile ministry in Bengal was over and there were signs that Britain wanted

40. The meeting of the working committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League held on 2 November passed a resolution expressing confidence in Jinnah's leadership and supporting the stand taken by him during the talks with Gandhi. *Star of India*, 3 November 1944.

to look at the Indian problem afresh.<sup>41</sup> In these changed circumstances and with the challenge thrown by Abul Hashim's progressive policies the influence of Nazimuddin's leadership tailed off among the Muslim MLAs. For the sake of their own position these MLAs thought it prudent to join the faction under Suhrawardy's leadership which by 1945 had become rather formidable.

The main reason, however, of the fall of Nazimuddin's ministry in March 1945 was that Hindus who had backed him in March 1943 gradually withdrew their support. Their state of mind can be explained in the words of Horace Alexander M.L.A. :

The honesty of Prime Minister Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin is generally recognized; but the Hindus look upon him as a tool in the hands of Mr. Jinnah and it is doubted whether he can stand up either to Mr. Jinnah or to some of the wealthy Muslim merchants, or in case of differences of opinion, to the Governor.<sup>42</sup>

Nazimuddin, on his part, tried to dispel the doubt in the minds of Hindus by his sincerity and in his presidential speech at the Gaya Pakistan Conference held on 9 April 1944 he said that "it is the duty of the Muslim ministries in the majority provinces to so govern and administer that non-Muslim minorities will have no reason to oppose Pakistan."<sup>43</sup>

However, the Nazimuddin administration failed to create confidence among Hindus. Hindu MLAs disagreed on the Bengal Secondary Education Bill (introduced in 1940 and referred to a select committee) and also felt unhappy over the pro-Muslim policies of the Government. The Famine Enquiry Commission in its report, while pointing to the above trend, lamented "that avoidable delay did take place"<sup>44</sup> in introducing rationing in Bengal. "The delay in the recruitment was accentuated at one stage by an endeavour to maintain communal

41. After the general election in Britain the Labour Party came to power which was sympathetic to Indian aspirations.

42. *Indian Annual Register*, 1943, vol. II, July-December, p. 45.

43. *Star of India*, 11 April 1944.

44. The Reports of Famine Enquiry Commission, n. 6, vol. V, p. 61.



proportions. We consider this to have been particularly unfortunate. In an emergency particularly one affecting the food of the people administrative action should not be delayed by attempts to observe rules fixing communal ratio." Hindus also felt that the policy the ministry had followed even in relief measures aimed more than anything else at rehabilitating Muslims in the distributive trade and business in Bengal.<sup>45</sup>

The downfall of Nazimuddin's ministry was brought about by a combined opposition under the leadership of Fazlul Huq. On 28 March 1945, 21 members of the Government party crossed floor and joined the opposition. Taking this opportunity Dharendra Nath Datta, deputy leader of the official Congress, opposed the budget demand of Rs. 2,04,00,000 moved by Muazzamuddin Hossain, Minister for Agriculture. Nalinaksha Sanyal, chief whip (Congress), moved that the question be put to vote. This was vehemently opposed by members of the ruling party who demanded a reasonable debate. Actually, the ruling party was caught unawares and when the motion was put to vote it was defeated by 106 to 97 votes. Next day while adjourning the Assembly, Speaker Nausher Ali ruled that since the ministry had been defeated the House could not function till a new ministry was formed. It was exactly two years before, to a day, on 28 March 1943, that Fazlul Huq's ministry had been terminated.

## VI

The infighting in the Bengal League leadership continued till the elections. The differences between the Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy groups became so acute that Nazimuddin declared his intention not to stand for election. The rift, however, was not bridged by this decision and matters came to a head at the time of elections to the Bengal League Parliamentary Board which was to select candidates for the ensuing Assembly elections. According to the constitution, the Board consisted of nine members. The president of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and the leader of the Parliamentary Party were *ex-officio* members and both the

45. *Indian Annual Register*, 1944, vol. I, January-June, p. 84.

lower house and the upper house were to elect one member each. The remaining five members were to be elected by the council of the Provincial Muslim League.

Nazimuddin's generosity in withdrawing from the contest had tilted the balance in his favour in the elections to the board from the two houses of legislature held on 1-3 October 1945. Suhrawardy contested but was rejected by the lower house. Fazlur Rahman was elected instead. Nurul Amin came from the upper house. Both these leaders belonged to the Nazimuddin group. This completely shattered Suhrawardy.<sup>46</sup> Abul Hashim, however, got five of his men elected by the council. This gave them an upperhand in a board of nine and Suhrawardy became its secretary.

Jinnah declared that the general elections to the Central and Provincial Assemblies would be "a plebiscite of the Muslims of India on Pakistan"<sup>47</sup> and he wanted "the Muslims of India to prove to the world that the All India Muslim League represents the Muslim nationals in this country." The Bengal Muslim League took up this challenge seriously. Abul Hashim prepared a draft manifesto declaring "Let us go to war" and put forward in lucid terms what elections meant to Bengal Muslims.<sup>48</sup> Since the League was not in power in Bengal, it could devote its full attention to winning the elections. At the same time it did not face a formidable challenge from any party. The Krishak Praja Party could count in its fold only a few outstanding Muslim leaders. By 1945 most of its leaders like Abul Mansur Ahmad, Abdulla-el Baqui, Shamsuddin Ahmad, Secretary, Krishak Praja Party, Hasan Ali, Nurul Islam Chowdhury and Giasuddin Ahmad had joined the Muslim League. Actually, after the Simla talks in June 1945, the regional parties lost all importance and from the trends in British thought it became quite clear that the constitutional issues were to be settled between the two major parties—the Congress and the Muslim League. Accordingly, the British announced elections to the central and

46. The author's interview with Abul Hashim, Dacca, 18 July 1972.

47. Jamil-ud-din Ahmed, *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah* (Lahore, 1964), vol. II, p. 202.

48. Draft Manifesto issued by Abul Hashim on 6 September 1945. See Appendix VII for the text.

provincial legislatures in order to allow the Congress and the League to prove their representative character.

To ensure maximum turn-out in Muslim constituencies in favour of the Muslim League and to demonstrate Bengal Muslims' unanimity about the Pakistan demand, Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy took two steps. They visited the district League offices and themselves selected popular candidates after hearing the claims of all those who desired to contest, and secondly, they launched a vigorous election campaign with the help of students and visited all parts of Bengal. They also kept away League leaders of particular localities who were not popular with the League workers. On the other hand, Nazimuddin and Akram Khan tried to influence the selection of candidates through the Central Parliamentary Board (CPB). A case in point was Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, editor of *Azad*, who was preferred by the CPB to Abul Mansur Ahmad who was selected by the Bengal Parliamentary Board.<sup>49</sup>

The League leaders, in their speeches, explained the idea of Pakistan in terms of socio-economic conditions as existed in the eastern parts of Bengal and Assam. The idea that they gave to Muslims was that Bengal and Assam would form an autonomous region in the Pakistan scheme. It meant, they argued, that Muslims who were backward but were in a majority would prosper. Abul Hashim's election tour particularly had a great impact in rural Bengal. The League meetings were very impressive in terms of participation.

In the context of the Pakistan movement, in Muslim constituencies the elections became an altogether unequal fight between the two opponents: the Muslim League on the one hand and a few Krishak Praja Party leaders on the other. The few Independents had to essentially bank on their personal popularity. The demand for Pakistan overshadowed any other talk of social, economic and political benefits.

The technique which the Muslim League adopted to boost the chances of its candidates in places where the Krishak Praja Party was strong consisted of organizing big and impressive Pakistan conferences. One of the conferences was held in

49. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar* (Dacca, 1970), p. 245. See *Star of India*, 27 February 1946.

Gaffargaon in Mymensingh where the Krishak Praja movement had been very strong for more than a decade. Maulana Samsul Huda, Krishak Praja candidate from that constituency, was not only a popular Praja leader but was also widely respected as an honest and sincere man. All this meant that the chances of the League candidate, Giasuddin Pathan, were bleak. However, since he was the secretary of the District League this contest came to be regarded as a prestigious one. To make the conference an impressive show not only the Bengal Muslim League leaders but also the secretary of the All-India Muslim League, Liaquat Ali Khan, attended it. The main resolution focussed attention on "abolition of zamindari without compensation". The resolution was passed with loud acclaim and pushed the Pakistan movement a step forward in the progressive direction.<sup>50</sup>

The meetings and conferences convinced Muslims that Muslim supremacy in Bengal, guaranteed by their majority but otherwise denied to them, could be achieved by the establishment of Pakistan. The condemnation of the Congress as Hindu body and that of the narrowness of the Hindu mind and Hindu society was openly done though there was no projection of the elections as a fight of Muslims against Hindus in order to establish an Islamic State in Bengal.

The Bengal election results<sup>51</sup>, so far as Muslim League victories were concerned, were unique, in respect both of the Muslim-majority as well as the Muslim-minority provinces. They disproved the claim made for years that the Pakistan movement was strong in the Muslim minority provinces where the well-to-do Muslims were denied power. The election results also proved that in Bengal the Pakistan movement was mass-based and democratic. They reflected the aspirations of Bengali Muslims for a Muslim majority state in Eastern India.

The Muslim League won all the six Muslim seats from Bengal to the Central Assembly. In the provincial legislature it captured all the six urban seats and 103 out of the 111 rural

50. Giasuddin Pathan won the election with considerable majority.

51. The elections results have been compiled from newspapers and *Indian Annual Register*, 1946, vol. I, January-June.

Muslim seats.<sup>52</sup> Thus out of 117 Muslim territorial seats the Muslim League captured 109 and out of 121 total Muslim seats 113. Of the seats representing special interests like commerce, university and women, all the four seats (2 Muslim women, 1 Muslim commerce and 1 Dacca University) were captured by the League. Of course, these four seats had been won by the Muslim League in the 1937 elections as well.<sup>53</sup>

Altogether eight Muslims (Fazlul Huq captured both the seats he contested) were elected outside the Muslim League. Five seats belonged to the Krishak Praja Party, three were Independents, including one Muslim elected from a labour constituency (a general seat). The League thus captured almost 93 per cent of the Muslim seats in the Bengal legislature. The total votes cast in favour of the Muslim League were 20,36,775 out of 24,34,100 total Muslim votes. The non-League Muslims polled only 3,97,325 votes.

## VII

The attempts made by that section of Muslim political opinion which was outside the Muslim League to foster the growth of politics of Hindu-Muslim unity in Bengal had clearly failed. Irrespective of their impact on the course of Muslim politics, their efforts had, however, been noteworthy. In 1943 when Fazlul Huq was removed from power and a Muslim League ministry under Nazimuddin was installed, the non-League Muslim faction suddenly was faced with a new situation. With the Muslim League becoming a progressive and democratic movement, this section could not prove its usefulness except through supporting another Muslim party in opposition to the demand for Pakistan.

The advantage of non-League Muslims in Bengal was that for the most part they were outside the Congress and therefore were not branded as 'Congressite Muslims'. The epithet 'Nationalist Muslims' could, however, neither place them in the

52. See page 69 for the composition of Bengal Legislative Assembly.

53. The seats captured by the Muslim League in other provinces were as follows : Assam 31 out of 34, Punjab 73 out of 84, Sind 28 out of 34, N.W. Frontier Province 17 out of 38, Bihar 34 out of 40, U.P. 55 out of 66, Bombay 30 out of 30, Orissa 4 out of 4, Madras 29 out of 29. *Star of India*, 7 and 8 April 1946.

mainstream of the political movement nor were they in a position to challenge the Muslim League in Bengal. The popularity of the Pakistan movement under the Muslim League during these years also denied them any independent role within Muslim politics. Their identifying themselves with the Krishak Praja movement, an economic movement of 80 per cent of Muslims who were peasants, lost all significance when the Pakistan idea gained an edge over them by the talk of a new orientation to the economic interests of Muslims in more concrete terms. Their influence as Krishak Praja leaders was confined to a few pockets of the original Praja movement. The ideological impact of the Pakistan movement was such that it blotted out the chances of any other political Muslim party of Bengal.

Attempts were, however, made by some leaders to sponsor even a provincial organization against the Muslim League. The Bengal Provincial League-e-Rasul was an attempt to organize Muslims who were against Pakistan. At a joint meeting held by this organization along with Jamiat-ul-Ulema, Bengal, on 18 May 1944, Hashem Ali Khan, an important Praja leader and ex-minister, declared that Pakistan was "negation of Islamic principles".<sup>54</sup> Such organizations, however, were not expected to stand the test of time.

It was realized by Muslim leaders outside the League all over India that to face the challenge of the League they ought to merge all Muslim organizations into an all-India political body. This need was particularly felt in the absence of Congress leaders who were behind the bars. A conference of Nationalist Muslims from all over the country was called in Delhi on 6-8 May 1944. Resolutions were passed demanding the formation of a national government and laying down the fundamental considerations on which the Hindu-Muslim problem could be solved.<sup>55</sup> The organization which came out of

54. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 19 May 1944.

55. The resolution suggested the solution of the communal problem on the following fundamental consideration :

(1) India should continue to remain a united country, (2) the constitution should be framed by her own people, (3) there should be an all-India federation, (4) units of the federation should be completely autonomous and all residuary powers vested in them, (5) every unit should be free to secede from federation as a result of plebiscite of all adult inhabitants,

these deliberations was the All-India Muslim Majlis. Why they wanted to form an all India Muslim organization was explained by the conference's president, A.M. Khwaja, in a statement which emphasized that the "League having changed its creed from full independence to Pakistan which they refused to define", the Nationalist Muslims felt the imperative need of an all-India organization, which would replace the League in due course.

From Bengal, Shamsuddin Ahmed, secretary, Krishak Praja Party, joined the deliberations. Before this Fazlul Huq had issued a statement welcoming the decision to call the conference. The secession clause in the resolution on the communal problem does suggest that they were not totally committed to an Indian union like the Congressite Muslims nor were they clear in their mind regarding the future position of the Muslim majority in any particular province. They were, however, conscious of the fact that the League had had "a free field for the last eight years"<sup>56</sup> which had made their task more difficult. This was followed by a similar conference convened by Fazlul Huq in Calcutta on 2 September 1944 to consider the C. Rajagopalachari's formula (C.R. formula).

This attempt on the part of the non-League Muslim leaders, though notable, was belated and could not attract all the Muslim organizations.<sup>57</sup> The fast-changing Indian political scene in the years 1944-45 rendered the exercise futile. The important developments were: C.R. formula, July 1944; Gandhi-Jinnah talks September 1944; the Simla conference, June 1945, and elections to the Central and Provincial legislatures held in the winter of 1945-46.

Both the C.R. formula and Gandhi-Jinnah talks neutralized the position of the Nationalist Muslims by recognizing on behalf of the Congress the claim of Jinnah and of the

(6) the religious, economic and cultural rights of the minorities should be fully and effectively safeguarded by reciprocal arrangements. *The Hindu*, 10 May 1944.

56. Statement issued by the President of All India Muslim Majlis. *The Hindu*, 19 May 1944.

57. Only the Krishak Praja Party of Bengal and Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind joined the conference. *The Hindu*, 7 May 1944.

Muslim League to speak for the Muslims of India. Time was also too short for the non-League Muslim leaders to build their position in order to challenge Jinnah and the Muslim League and offer any workable alternative to Pakistan. They concentrated on the idea of Hindu-Muslim settlement which was also one of the basic principles of the Congress and Gandhi. Even on the question of Hindu-Muslim settlement, there was no scope for any political initiative of their own, theirs not being a representative organization.

The Gandhi-Jinnah talks and Gandhi's recognition of Jinnah's leadership of Muslims caused disarray among the Nationalist Muslims. "The time has come", said Fazlul Huq, "when representatives of all sections of Muslim political thought in India should come together and decide the best means of achieving the independence of India and of having their Pakistan also, if indispensably necessary."<sup>58</sup>

In June 1945 the British Government took a step forward to end the Indian political deadlock. The Viceroy, Lord Wavell, called a representative conference in Simla to consider "proposals designed to ease the present political situation and to advance India towards her goal of full self-government".<sup>59</sup> The selection of persons invited for the talks revealed the official thinking.<sup>60</sup> The attempt on the part of the British not to recognize any other Hindu political force which was in conflict with the Congress (like the Hindu Mahasabha) and any other Muslim political force which was in opposition to the Muslim League (like Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind) proved that they were henceforth going to have discussions essentially of the constitutional issues only with a limited group of persons. The Government denied to leaders of Indian opinion other

58. Statement of Fazlul Huq, *The Statesman*, 1 October 1944.

59. The Viceroy's broadcast on 14 June 1945.

60. The persons invited were the provincial Premiers and the last Premiers of the Provinces now under Section 93 of Government of India Act, the leaders of the Congress, the Muslim League, the Nationalist Party and the European group in the Central Assembly, the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League in the Council of State, Gandhi and Jinnah as the recognized leaders of the two political parties, N. Shiva Rao and Master Tara Singh as representatives of the Scheduled Castes and Sikhs, respectively.



than those belonging to the Congress and the Muslim League any effective role in shaping the future of India in that critical period of history. This eliminated elements in Indian political life other than the Congress and the Muslim League.

When after the failure of the Simla talks the British decided to hold general elections to the provincial and central legislatures, the Muslim political groups outside the League again tried to organize themselves as an all-India political party and fight the elections against the Muslim League. Jamiat-ul-Ulema took the initiative and called a conference of all nationalist Muslim organizations in Delhi on 18 September 1945. The Nationalist Muslim Parliamentary Board was formed with 21 members—8 from Jamiat-ul-Ulema and Muslim Majlis, 3 each of Momin Conference and Krishak Praja Party, 2 of Anjuman Watan and 5 of other parties. They decided on a common policy to fight the elections against the Muslim League. This was followed by another conference on 2 October 1945 at Karachi where it was decided to present a united front against the Muslim League during the elections and create a new political alternative for the Muslim masses in the province. In the meantime, the Congress did not make any overtures to this group; only Sarat Bose issued a statement saying that he would endeavour to bring all nationalist Muslims inside the Congress.

However, Jinnah's declaration that the elections would be a plebiscite of the Muslims on the Pakistan demand against the Congress demand of a federal Indian union of willing partners put their bonafides into question: to the Congressmen on the question of India's independence, to the Muslim Leaguers on the question whether the nationalist Muslims were trying to drive a wedge in the Muslim ranks. The election results confirmed that the forces in Muslim politics outside the Muslim League had very little appeal to the Muslim electorate and in that the latter was clearly behind Jinnah and his demand for Pakistan.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE RISE OF SUHRAWARDY : PAKISTAN VS UNITED BENGAL 1946-47

The issues involved in the partition of India in 1947 and the factors leading to it are outside the purview of this study. The three parties involved in it were the British Government, the Congress and Jinnah representing the All India Muslim League. The ultimate cause of partition can perhaps be explained in the words of Mansergh that when the British decided to quit Jinnah was "prepared to let Independence wait upon division, while the Congress was not prepared to let Independence wait upon unity".<sup>1</sup>

The trends in the inner politics of the League in Bengal during the pre-election days made it a foregone conclusion that Suhrawardy would replace Nazimuddin as leader of the party in the legislature. To the rank and file this meant victory of the progressive forces in the League.

Suhrawardy formed the Muslim League ministry in April 1946. He reduced the number of ministers from 13 under Nazimuddin to 11 and parliamentary secretaries from 17 to 12. Of the Muslim ministers who were with Nazimuddin only Muazzamuddin Hossain was in the new ministry and only one of the 17 parliamentary secretaries of Nazimuddin's ministry, Nasarullah, was included. Another important aspect of the new ministry was that whereas both Nazimuddin and Fazlul Huq had maintained parity in the number of Muslim and Hindu ministers (except the prime minister), Suhrawardy took only three Hindu ministers, two of whom belonged to the Scheduled Castes. Many of Suhrawardy's lieutenants found place in the ministry or became parliamentary secretaries. The existence of a solid bloc of 35 supporters of Nazimuddin in the Assembly, however, became a kind of check on the new ministry.

1. Nicholas Mansergh—*Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs : Problems of Wartime Cooperation and Post-war Change 1939-1952* (London 1958), p. 209.

Before Suhrawardy formed his ministry a momentous decision had been taken in early April. The decision, though seemingly innocuous at that moment, later became a big constitutional issue.

In February 1946, when the provincial elections were in progress and the Bengal election was yet to be held, the decision of the British Cabinet to send a Cabinet Mission to India was announced. It consisted of Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. A. V. Alexander. The Mission arrived in India in March 1946 with the purpose of discussing with the Indian representatives steps to be taken, first 'to secure the widest measure of agreement as to the method of framing a constitution', second, 'the setting up of a constitution making body', and third, 'the bringing into being of an Executive Council having the support of the main Indian parties'.<sup>2</sup> These proposals along with the British Labour Party's election to power in 1945 meant different things for the Muslim League and the Congress. While to the Congress a Labour Government meant 'early attainment' of self-government, to the Muslim League it meant opposition to their demand for Pakistan since the Labour leaders were "allergic to Muslim League demand for partition and separate Muslim state".<sup>3</sup> Jinnah decided to fight for a separate constitution-making body for a separate State of Pakistan.

In April 1946, Jinnah called a convention of Muslim League legislators of the Central and Provincial Assemblies in Delhi. At the convention Suhrawardy<sup>4</sup> moved the resolution which changed the word "States" into "State" and thereby the demand for a single Pakistan State was voiced by the elected Muslim representatives. The resolution declared that "the

2. Statement by Lord Pethick-Lawrence on the proposed Cabinet Mission to India on 19 February 1946. *The Statesman*, 21 February 1946.

3. Mansergh says: "In the last phase of British rule the concern of the rulers was to hand over responsibility for a united India to an Indian government. The whole bias of their minds was against partition on economic and social as much as on political grounds; far from wishing to 'divide and rule' they wished to unite and abdicate." Mansergh, n. 1. p. 211.

4. It was the first Council meeting attended by Suhrawardy after long absence from 1942-46.

Muslim nation will never submit to any constitution for a united India and will never participate in any single constitution-making machinery set up for the purpose.”<sup>5</sup> While ruling out any independent dealing with the Muslim majority provinces or majority zones, the resolution specified the following: “That the zones comprising Bengal and Assam in the North-East and the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the North-West of India, namely Pakistan zones where the Muslims are in a dominant majority, be constituted into a sovereign independent State and that an unequivocal undertaking be given to implement the establishment of Pakistan without delay.”<sup>6</sup>

It is said that the facts of Cabinet delegation coming to India and the election victories made Jinnah think about one Pakistan comprising Eastern and Western zones and to get the resolution accepted by the legislators’ convention in order to arm him against any move by the Labour Government for a united India. This is clear from the fact that he enclosed this resolution with his first letter to Pethick-Lawrence defining the terms and conditions acceptable to the Muslim League.<sup>7</sup> Besides, Jinnah wanted to make the legislators commit themselves to the Muslim League’s basic demand, i.e. Pakistan. This move provided a constitutional basis to this demand, the legislators being the elected representatives of Muslims of India. Second, he also wanted them to commit to the Pakistan as specified by the resolution and in the process to rule out individual or independent arrangement with the Muslim zones by the British Government from the beginning.

5. *Command Papers*, Cmd. 6829, 1946. Resolution passed by the Subjects Committee to be placed before the All-India Muslim League Legislators’ Convention on 9 April 1946. Enclosure to Jinnah’s letter to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, dated 29 April 1946. Also *Resolutions of the All-India Muslim League from January 1944 to December 1946* (Delhi, n. d.), pp. 45-47.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Jinnah enclosed the resolution which was passed by the Subjects Committee and not the one passed by the Legislators’ Convention. Literally though there was no difference between the two, the fact that he enclosed this on 29 April even 10 days after the Legislators’ Convention proved that Jinnah alone used to draft all the documents regarding the constitutional demand of Indian Muslims and others did not have any say.

As described above, the developments in 1945-46 brought a shift in Jinnah's idea about Pakistan. The original idea behind the Lahore resolution was that Muslims should enjoy absolute power where they were in a majority. That was his Pakistan. He spoke of Hindu zones and Muslim zones again and again. Before 1945 he was not clear in his mind about Pakistan or Pakistans. While he had never used the word Pakistans, he also did not clearly state that there would be one state comprising the Muslim zones in the East and the West. Many afterwards tried to clear the ambiguity created by the use of the word "States" in the Lahore resolution by referring to Jinnah's letter to Gandhi during the Gandhi-Jinnah talks in September 1944.<sup>8</sup> A discussion about this point from their letters shows that Jinnah did not say that the Muslim zones (meaning Eastern and Western zones) would be "units of Pakistan" but meant that 'constituents in two zones' would be 'units of Pakistan'.<sup>9</sup> In his letter dated 15 September 1944 Gandhi enquired: "Are the constituents in the two zones to constitute 'independent States' an undefined number in each zone?"<sup>10</sup> (vide item 6). Jinnah in his reply dated 17 September 1944 wrote: "No. They will form units of Pakistan"<sup>11</sup> (vide item 6). From the above clarification it does not follow that the Muslim majority zones in the west and in the east would form 'units of Pakistan'. Rather it emphasized that the constituents in the North-Western and Eastern Zones would form units of Pakistan—meaning that either there would be two Pakistans or that there would be a Federation of Pakistan. Jinnah scrupulously avoided defining Pakistan, banking on the British assurance that whatever might be the arrangement for the solution of the existing deadlock none of the "changes suggested will in any way prejudice or prejudge the essential form of the future permanent

8. "The ambiguity created by the use of the word 'States' was clarified by Mr. M.A. Jinnah in his letter dated 14 September 1944 to M.K. Gandhi", Sherwani maintains. Latif Ahmed Sherwani, ed., *Pakistan Resolution to Pakistan 1940-47* (Karachi, 1969), p. 21, note 2.

9. Gandhi-Jinnah Talks, *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), October 1944, pp. 12-16.

10. Ibid., p. 13.

11. Ibid., p. 16.

constitution or constitutions for India.”<sup>12</sup> Taking shelter under the guarantee that there could be ‘constitution or constitutions’ for India, Jinnah did not move a step towards defining the form of the Pakistan constitution or Pakistan State he envisaged.

So when the legislators’ convention changed the word ‘States’ into ‘State’ it stipulated a major change in the original resolution which had been passed by the annual general meeting. And yet this change went unnoticed in 1946 although Abul Hashim claimed that he had raised this point during the discussion but was not allowed to talk.<sup>13</sup> In February 1947 the British Government declared the decision of notional partition of India and this was followed by the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha’s demand for partition of Bengal. Muslims in Bengal were confronted with a situation which utterly demonstrated the bankruptcy of the provincial League leaders who committed the greatest blunder by toeing blindly the All India Muslim League line. They then realized the significance of the removal of ‘s’ from the word ‘states’ and in 1947 it became a grave constitutional issue between the All India Muslim League leaders and the Bengal League leaders.<sup>14</sup>

Without going into the merits of the controversy it can be said that none of the Bengal League leaders at that time was clear in his mind about the form of Pakistan or the position of Bengal and Assam in the future Pakistan. Nor did any of them ever raise the issue at meetings of the working committee or the council of the All India Muslim League during the years after the Lahore resolution. Akram Khan, Nazimuddin and Ispahani, the members representing Bengal in the working committee, were no doubt thoroughly committed to Jinnah and the All India Muslim League, but Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy who made the Muslim League the Muslim people’s party in Bengal had never bothered or seriously thought about the implications of Pakistan for Bengal. In the All India League politics as it

12. Secretary of State’s statement in House of Commons on 14 June 1945. *Indian Annual Register*, 1945, vol. I, January-June, p. 250.

13. The author’s interview with Abul Hashim, Dacca, 18 July 1972.

14. See also ‘Independent Sovereign Bengal Move’ discussed subsequently .

emerged during 1946-47 they had to acquiesce in Jinnah's authority over League politics and League politicians but there is no indication that they held even a private discussion with Jinnah about this matter or that they had ever tried to explain this point to Bengal Muslims as such.

They never paid any heed to the warning given by Fazlul Huq that the 'Pakistan idea' should be modified to the extent to give the right of 'self-determination' to Bengal Muslims.<sup>15</sup> As late as mid-1945, the Sind League Council, the only other province where the Muslim League was strong and where there was a League ministry after the election, demanded by a resolution that the All India Muslim League should revise its policy, and transfer control of Assembly parties from the Central Parliamentary Board to the provincial Leagues. G.M. Syed, Muslim League president, demanded 'sovereign powers' for the provincial League at Karachi.<sup>16</sup>

Jinnah's intention in asking Suhrawardy to introduce the resolution is easy to understand. He wanted to rule out any future controversy about the removal of 's' by making the League parliamentary leader of Bengal introduce the resolution and thereby also to attach importance to Bengal, the largest Muslim majority province in India. But why Suhrawardy agreed can perhaps be explained by the fact that after his initial victory over the Nazimuddin-Ispahani group and also the victory of his group at the polls, which further strained his relations with Jinnah, he as leader of the Bengal League could not risk a challenge to Jinnah and go into wilderness. Instead to build up a working relationship with Jinnah he submitted, on the one hand, to prove his commitment to the policy of the All India Muslim League and, on the other, to assure Jinnah that he could trust him as his representative in Bengal. However, after the great victory of March 1946, the Legislators' Convention held on 9 April 1946 was too early to enable a sound prediction about how Suhrawardy's mind was working. The subsequent

15. Fazlul Huq's letter dated 2 February 1943 to *The Statesman*. See p. 135.

16. The resolution passed at the meeting of the Council of Sind Provincial Muslim League held on 6 May 1945. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 8 May 1945.

events showed that Suhrawardy tried to build an independent position for Bengal in the future shape of Pakistan which the All India League leaders equally stubbornly kept as their own monopoly.

## II

The other event which was of vital significance for the League as well as the Congress in Bengal was the observance by the former of the 'Direct Action Day' followed by the Calcutta riots. The 'British betrayal', as the Muslims termed the Cabinet Mission's successive proposals, and their failure made Jinnah to 'bid good-bye to constitutional methods' and take to a programme of 'direct action for the achievement of Pakistan'.<sup>17</sup> Jinnah, however, declared that it was the attitude of the Congress which had created the necessity of reconsidering the decision of the League Council accepting the proposals.<sup>18</sup> He called another meeting of the Council at Bombay on 27-29 July 1946 to consider whether 'to scrap it or modify it' and to decide what the Council had got to say about the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy.<sup>19</sup> The Council passed two resolutions, by the first it rejected the Cabinet Mission Plan and by the second it resolved to resort to the Direct Action to achieve Pakistan. The latter resolution said:

Whereas the Council of the All India Muslim League has resolved to reject the proposals embodied in the statement of the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy dated 16th May, 1946 due to the intransigence of the Congress on one hand, and the breach of faith with the Muslims by the British Government on the other; and whereas Muslim India has exhausted without success all efforts to find a peaceful solution of the Indian problem by compromise and constitutional means; and whereas the Congress is bent upon setting up Caste-Hindu Raj in India with the connivance of the British; and whereas

17. Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah Creator of Pakistan* (London, 1954), p. 164.

18. Jinnah's speech at the meeting of Council of the All India Muslim League at Bombay on 27 April 1946. *Star of India*, 28 April 1946.

19. Ibid.



recent events have shown that power politics and not justice and fairplay are the deciding factors in Indian affairs; and whereas it has become abundantly clear that the Muslims of India would not rest contented with anything less than the immediate establishment of Independent and fully Sovereign State of Pakistan and would resist any attempt to impose any constitution-making machinery or any constitution, long term or short term, or the setting up of any Interim Government at the centre without the approval and consent of the Muslim League; the Council of the All India Muslim League is convinced that now the time has come for the Muslim Nation to resort to Direct Action to achieve Pakistan to assert their just rights, to vindicate their honour and to get rid of present British slavery and the contemplated future caste-Hindu domination.<sup>20</sup>

Immediately on the heels of this resolution the Working Committee declared 16 August as a 'Direct Action Day' and instructed Muslims "to suspend all business on the 16th of August and observe complete hartal" and directed the provincial and district Leagues "to hold public meetings throughout the country on Friday" in order to explain the two resolutions to Muslims.<sup>21</sup>

This was the plan laid down for the observance of Direct Action Day. The carnage which broke out in Calcutta, therefore, on 16 August and its total unexpectedness would be difficult to explain in terms of this programme alone. This calamity showed that both Hindus and Muslims could equally play 'at the game' although it might have been started by one of them and that "Hindus had the best of it".<sup>22</sup> The resolution itself said two things: that the League's Direct Action was directed against 'British slavery' and against 'the contemplated future

20. Resolution no. 2 passed at the meeting of Council on 29 July 1946. *Resolutions of All India Muslim League*, n. 5, pp. 65-66.

21. Resolution passed at the Working Committee meeting on 31 July at Bombay. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

22. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's letter dated 27 August 1946 to R.K. Sidhwa, Karachi and the letter to Stafford Cripps dated 19 October, 1946. Durga Das, ed., *Sardar Patel's Correspondence* (Bombay, 1972), pp. 148 and 182.

caste-Hindu domination'. It did not therefore rule out that the action was against the Hindu community as well.

Secondly, with this veiled threat the speeches of the League leaders emphasizing that the time had come when the Muslims should prepare themselves, if necessary 'to fight for Pakistan', pointed to the direction that things were going to take. Even before this resolution was passed Abul Hashim said in the Legislators' Convention in New Delhi in April 1946 "where justice and equity failed, shining steel would decide the issue".<sup>23</sup> He pointed out that "the struggle for Akhand Bharat was a struggle for exploitation, domination and injustice"<sup>24</sup> and cautioned that Bengal was ready for any action that might be taken for the achievement of Pakistan. Suhrawardy apparently echoed him at the Council meeting in July which rejected the Cabinet Mission Plan "that we cannot any more rely either on the professions of British friendliness or on the hope that the Congress will one day do justice to us. The Congress was out to destroy Muslim resurgence in this country.... Let the Congress beware that it is not going to fight just a handful of people fighting for power, but a nation which is struggling for its life and will secure that life".<sup>25</sup> Speaking about the League's role, Jinnah said that the League throughout the negotiations had been moved by a sense of fair play and had sacrificed the full sovereignty of Pakistan at the altar of the Congress for securing the independence of the whole of India.<sup>26</sup> He warned that in doing so "we were moved by a desire not to allow the situation to develop into bloodshed and civil war. This situation should be avoided, if possible. In our anxiety to try to come to a peaceful settlement the League leaders accepted a limited Pakistan".<sup>27</sup> Whether this meant that Jinnah ruled out bloodshed and civil war is doubtful; it perhaps meant that according to Jinnah and other important League leaders the only alternative was bloodshed and civil war.

23. *Star of India*, 10 April, 1946.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Suhrawardy's speech at the Council meeting on 29 July 1946. *Ibid.*, 30 July 1946.

26. *Indian Annual Register*, 1946, vol. II, July-December, p. 178.

27. *Ibid.*

And that was what Calcutta witnessed on the day of Direct Action and the days following. What followed in Noakhali and Bihar was a reaction to it. Secondly, in Calcutta the killing had been 'even for both sides'<sup>28</sup> whereas in Noakhali, Bihar and even in Gurmukhteswar the killings had been mainly one-sided. There was no provocation and no resistance or retaliation by the other side in any one of these latter places. The 'even killing' in Calcutta strengthens the assumption that both Hindus and Muslims were equally prepared.

It is difficult to answer the question, whether there was any escape from the fact that direct action against the British Government, as some of the Bengal League leaders contemplated,<sup>29</sup> meant in Bengal that it was directed against Suhrawardy's Government. The alternative interpretation that direct action was against the British Government at the Centre, and also against Congress installation at the Centre, if tenable, perhaps would lead one to conclude that Suhrawardy involved the Government of Bengal in an action against the British as well as against the Government at the Centre. It is difficult to disprove this assumption in view of Suhrawardy's declaration that in case the British Government bypassed the Muslim League and put the Congress into power there would be "the declaration of complete independence by Bengal" and he would see to it that "no revenue is received by such Central Government from Bengal".<sup>30</sup> His emphatic declaration, "We will . . . consider ourselves as a separate State having no connexion with the Centre"<sup>31</sup> was perhaps made in a mood of forgetfulness of the fact that the nearly one half of Bengal's people were not the followers of the Muslim League. These utterances created a feeling of insecurity among Hindus. It was against this background that Direct Action was observed in Calcutta in August 1946.

Secondly, the absence of the instruction 'peaceful observance' in the League leaders' speeches during the period 1-15 August along with the circulation of a number of inflammatory

28. Francis Toker, *While Memory Serves* (London, 1950), p. 46.

29. The author's interview with Abul Hashim, Dacca, 18 July, 1972.

30. V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Bombay, 1957), p. 294.

31. Ibid.

pamphlets in Calcutta were advance warnings of the riots that were to break out. Some of the examples are quoted below.<sup>32</sup>

By the grace of God we, ten crores in India, through bad luck, have become slaves of the Hindus and the British. We are starting a Jihad in Your name in this very month of Ramzan. We promise before You that we entirely depend on You. Make us victorious over the *Kafirs*, enable us to establish the kingdom of Islam in India. . . .<sup>33</sup>

In this month of Ramzan, the first open war between Islam and *Kafirs* started and the Mussalmans got the permission to wage Jihad . . . and Islam secured a splendid victory. . . . According to wishes of God, the All-India Muslim League has chosen this sacred month for launching this Jihad for achieving Pakistan.<sup>34</sup>

We Muslims have had the crown and have ruled. Do not lose heart, be ready and take swords. . . . Oh *Kafir* ! your doom is not far and the general massacre will come. We shall show our glory with swords in hands and will have a special victory.<sup>35</sup>

Leaving aside the question of who started the riot and when it started, it can be said that the Muslim feeling was that Hindus were set upon spoiling their observance of Direct

32. The original pamphlets were not seen and the collections have been published in books written by Hindus. Secondly, it is not the intention here to say that Hindus did not publish any inflammatory pamphlets. Since the study is essentially of Muslim politics the search of material was limited in its scope.

33. Extract from a leaflet containing a special prayer for Jihad, issued by S.M. Usman, Secretary of the Calcutta Muslim League, for Direct Action Day, August 1946. *Let Pakistan Speak for Herself* by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India (New Delhi 1947), p. 6.

34. English translation of an extract from an Urdu pamphlet published by S.M. Usman, Secretary, Calcutta Muslim League (Calcutta, 1946). Usman was the Mayor of Calcutta at that time. *Modern Review*, September 1946, p. 170.

35. Extract from a Muslim League pamphlet, Calcutta, August 1946. *Let Pakistan Speak Herself*, n. 33, p. 7.

Action by resorting to rioting and looting<sup>36</sup> and by attacking the processionists from Hindu housetops.<sup>37</sup> Hindus on the other hand felt that because of the fact that the Muslim League was in power, Muslims in Calcutta were determined to show to the whole of India what it meant when they were directed to action. Muslims resorted to looting and arson while compelling the Hindu shopkeepers to observe hartal. To this end there had been, Hindus alleged, great induction of bad elements from other provinces into Calcutta.<sup>38</sup>

An estimate of Direct Action and the riots that followed brings out certain points and leads to certain observations. The fact that Muslim losses were heavier proved that there had been preparation by Hindus and that "local Hindu organisations, hearing rumours that some sort of Muslim attack was contemplated, had made formidable counter-preparations".<sup>39</sup> Secondly, the fact that the first repercussion of the Calcutta riots began in Noakhali—a Muslim majority area—and by Muslims and not Hindus in a Hindu majority area proved that Muslim losses in Calcutta were far greater than those of Hindus. Actually the greater portion of those killed in Calcutta were from the poorer sections of both communities—the shop-keepers and dock-workers (khalasis) who were mostly Muslims from Noakhali, *gwalas* (milkmen), cartmen,

36. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, *Atit Diner Smriti* (Dacca, 1968), p. 293 ; M.A.H. Ispahani, *Quaid-E-Azam Jinnah As I Knew Him* (Karachi, 1967), edn. 2, p. 233 ; Suhrawardy's speech on the no-confidence motion brought forward by the Congress in the Assembly on 20 September 1946. "It was a thousand pities that the Hindus of Bengal and Calcutta were determined to see that August 16 should not be a success", Suhrawardy said, "under the mistaken belief that if the Muslims made the day a success, Pakistan would be established". He referred to a leaflet circulated by the Hindu Mahasabha which emphasized "that to observe hartal on August 16 would be helping the League and supporting their demand of Pakistan". *Indian Annual Register*, 1946, vol. II, July-December, p. 192.

37. M.A.H. Ispahani's speech in the Assembly on 20 September 1946. *Indian Annual Register*, 1946, vol. II, July-December, p. 189.

38. *Prabashi*, vol. 46, part 2, no. 1, Kartik 1353, B.S., editorial, p. 2, and vol. 48, part 1, no. 1, Baisakh 1355 B.S., p. 2. This is a widely read Bengali monthly, counterpart of *Modern Review* and supposed to be the spokesman of Hindu views.

39. Ian Stephens, *Pakistan* (London, 1963), p. 106.

rickshawpullers and darwans or door-keepers, who were mainly from Bihar.<sup>40</sup> This was the reason for the retaliations taking place in Noakhali and in Bihar. The fact that most of the processionists on Direct Action Day carried big sticks, i.e. lathis and other materials proves the assumption that they had prepared for grave situations and that only a spark was needed to start a civil war in that explosive situation. Suhrawardy had declared 16 August as a holiday.<sup>41</sup>

Lastly, the failure to take "the precaution of sending foot and mounted police to accompany processions as is done with Moharrum and other processions"<sup>42</sup> could perhaps be explained by the Government "policy of non-interference with political demonstration"<sup>43</sup> but definitely was condemnable as inaction of the Government in the face of a grave situation. Though it does not prove as Hindus alleged that the Government's orders were the main reason behind police inaction, the fact that "Suhrawardy's continual presence in the control room on the first day with many Muslim League friends and his obvious communal bias", and "that there were no attacks on the police"<sup>44</sup>—perhaps do not give him even the benefit of doubt. As pointed out by the *Times of India* on 7 August 1946, a week before the great killing, that "quite an interesting situation will have been created by Leaguers breaking the law in Sind and Bengal where the League may be in charge of the maintenance of law".<sup>45</sup> This was sufficient to caution the Government about the law and order situation in the event

40. A note on the disturbances in Bihar prepared by Jawaharlal Nehru who visited the riot-torn areas in Bihar. Durga Das, ed., *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-50* (Ahmedabad, 1972), vol. III, p. 168.

41. This action of Suhrawardy had been vehemently criticized by Hindus and there is also no justification in ordering a holiday on the day of the programme of a party, while the party was in power. The Muslim leaders lately criticized this action of Suhrawardy. The author's interview with Abul Mansur Ahmad, Md. Waliullah, Dacca, July 1972.

42. The Congress Working Committee resolution on Calcutta Riots. *Modern Review*, September 1946, p. 172.

43. Suhrawardy's speech in the Assembly on 20 September 1946.

44. Wavell's diary on 26 August 1946, Penderel Moon, ed., *Wavell The Viceroy's Journal* (London, 1973), p. 339.

45. *Times of India*, 7 August 1946.

disturbances broke out in the city. The fact that there had been no arrest on the day of Direct Action, though everyone in Calcutta apprehended trouble, proved beyond doubt, as pointed out by Abul Hashim, that the British Government was in collusion with the League leaders in power.<sup>46</sup>

The suddenness and the fury of murder, arson and loot perhaps could not be explained by the fact that Hindus in Bengal were out to discredit the Muslim League ministry, the League in Bengal or the Muslim League observance of Direct Action Day. Nor is the contention that if Muslims had wanted to start riots they would have selected a safer place than Calcutta where they were in a minority.<sup>47</sup> All said and done, Calcutta had the largest concentration of uneducated up-country Muslims in small trade, like shopkeeping, meat trade and in factories in and around the city. The Hindu contention that Muslims made elaborate preparations for riots is also not tenable in view of the fact that Muslim losses were far greater than those of Hindus. Arthur Moore's following comment explained best the happenings in August 1946: "For any given man-made catastrophe, all participating parties bear some responsibility. In party politics the procedure considered correct and honourable is for each component to blame the others and entirely exonerate himself."<sup>48</sup> While describing the events in Calcutta during the fateful four days, the *Statesman*, a leading British paper and definitely not a pro-Hindu paper, said:

This is not a riot. It needs a word found in mediaeval

46. "From the nature of the communal disturbances in Bengal", Abul Hashim said, "I am of the opinion that these are being engineered and encouraged by Anglo-British vested interests and their Indian allies". The author's interview with Abul Hashim, Dacca, 18 July 1972. See also Serajuddin Hussain, *Days Decisive* (Dacca, 1970), Appendix D, p. 102.

47. M.A.H. Ispahani, 20 September 1946. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*.

48. Letter to the editor, *The Statesman*, 27 August 1946, quoted in D.G. Dalton, 'Gandhi During Partition: A Case Study in the Nature of Satyagrah', C.H. Philips, ed., *Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives 1937-47* (London, 1970), p. 229.

history, a fury. Yet 'fury' sounds spontaneous and there must have been some deliberation and organisations to set this fury on its way. The horde who ran about battering and killing with 8ft *Lathis* may have found them lying about or brought them out of their own pockets, but that is hard to believe. We have already commented on the bands who found it easy to get petrol and vehicles when no others were permitted on the streets. It is not mere supposition that men were imported to Calcutta to help making an impression.<sup>49</sup>

However, it is arguable whether the majority of the League leaders and also the majority of Muslim student leaders were in the know of the developments. That they attended the meeting in the Maidan and that a number of the student leaders went to different parts of Bengal to help organize meetings and processions,<sup>50</sup> are conclusive evidences that whatever preparations were made by a section of extreme League leaders in Calcutta were scrupulously hidden from the rest.

In conclusion it can be said that the riots in Calcutta and Noakhali in 1946 decided the relations between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal for decades to come. Their memory still lingers among the people of Bengal. Direct Action had earned its historic importance not because Pakistan was achieved on that day but because on its corpses was laid the edifice of Bengal partition. From what happened in Calcutta and Noakhali in 1946 it had to be concluded that if Pakistan was to be conceded, Hindus in Bengal would have to be separated from the Muslim League and Muslims. The successive Muslim ministries in Bengal had failed to create confidence in the Hindu mind. The last straw on the camel's back perhaps was the forced conversion of Hindus resorted to by Muslims in Noakhali and Tipperah. It created panic in the Hindu mind and filled it with distrust of the Muslim intentions. The Government's conservative estimate of the figures of abduction

49. *The Statesman*, 20 August 1946. See also *Indian Annual Register*, 1946, vol. II, July-December, p. 69.

50. The author's interviews with Abul Hashim, Nooruddin, Mahbub, Moazzem, Dacca, July 1972.



and forced conversions shows that the situation in those places was bad enough.<sup>51</sup>

While the Noakhali episode weakened Hindus' faith, the induction of 500 Punjabi Muslims into the Armed Police by Suhrawardy<sup>52</sup> further strained the fast deteriorating relations between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal. The band of Punjabi Muslims, subsequently called "Shahidiya Bahini,"<sup>53</sup> was brought by Suhrawardy to restore confidence in the Muslims' mind in Calcutta. He said it was imperative in view of the fact that during the riots there were only 64 Muslims out of 1,264 Armed Police in Calcutta and he wanted to remedy the situation by inducting Muslims from the Punjab in the Calcutta Armed Police.<sup>54</sup>

### III

Between Direct Action Day and 20 February 1947 Declaration of His Majesty's Government the politics or political developments at the Centre did not affect the Bengal League leaders or League politics. The Bengal League had won the Pakistan battle in the election and its leader, Suhrawardy, had accorded unflinching support to Jinnah and the All India Muslim League in the face of the challenges thrown by the Congress, the Viceroy and the Cabinet Delegation at successive stages of constitutional discussions.

To assess Suhrawardy's contribution to the Bengal Muslim League politics certain developments need detailed discussion. Suhrawardy came to power in March 1946 and Nazimuddin was rejected. This was a sore point with the All Indian League leadership and also with the Calcutta Muslim League as

51. Letter from E.H. LeBrocq, D.I.G. Police, Bakarganj Range, No. 110 CC dated 4 March 1947, Government of Bengal Confidential File 49/47 and 47/47, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca. See Appendix VIII for the report.

52. Moon, n. 44, p. 370.

53. *Ittefaq* Special Issue on 'Suhrawardy', March 1964, p. 21.

54. Suhrawardy's statement about the appointment of Punjab Muslim Police in Calcutta Police Force. *Azad*, 17 March 1947.

represented by Ispahani and the Muslim commercial class.<sup>55</sup> In order to earn credit in the eyes of the All India League leaders Suhrawardy had introduced a resolution at the Legislators' Convention held in April 1946 which totally changed the idea of Pakistan as contemplated by the Lahore resolution. Next, he became a willing and active participant in Direct Action, also perhaps with the intention of impressing the League High Command, quite ignoring the absurdity of being the Premier and instigator of direct action against the Government at the same time. His support to Jinnah was total when he declared that he would see to it that the Centre did not receive any revenue from Bengal if the Congress were placed in power.

It is true that Suhrawardy was not in a position to challenge Jinnah at that time and could not set a separate course of action but his over-enthusiasm in making Direct Action Day a success in Bengal and his declaration regarding the tax matter was overdone. While Jinnah put enough importance on Bengal and Sind which had the only Muslim League Governments and also on their Premiers, he and Liaquat Ali Khan were, in fact, not prepared to accept Suhrawardy as the leader of Bengal Muslims. Their preference was for Nazimuddin in any future scheme of things.

Probably the calamity that descended upon Calcutta on Direct Action Day gave Suhrawardy some second thoughts. He seems to have changed his mind and sincerely wanted to restore confidence among Hindus. This can be seen in his attempt to form a coalition government in Bengal with Hindus who had broad support and not with non-representative Hindus as had been the case with the Muslim League ministries until then. He met Jinnah at Bombay on 6 September after the riots and requested him to permit a coalition government in Bengal. Jinnah refused point blank.<sup>56</sup> Although his attempt

55. "Suhrawardy, a trusted lieutenant of Nazimuddin", wrote Ispahani, "began to feel that this was the time for him to snatch power from the Chief and to seat himself in Chief Minister's chair. Encouraged by his lieutenants and accomplices he struck hard and with success, and poor Nazimuddin was knocked out". Ispahani, n. 36, p. 200.

56. While recording this in his diary dated 8 September 1946 Wavell commented: "He had obviously drawn a complete blank with Jinnah

failed and he is certainly to be blamed for introducing the resolution which changed the Lahore Resolution and in turn deprived East Bengal of autonomy when Pakistan came into being,"<sup>57</sup> Suhrawardy perhaps remains the only parliamentary League leader who wanted to save the interests of Bengal by attempting to forge unity among Hindus and Muslims, at least at the parliamentary level.

Another reason why Suhrawardy might have wanted a coalition government, perhaps, was that after the tragic happenings in Calcutta, Hindus in Bengal wanted the removal of Suhrawardy and his ministry. Suhrawardy knew that he might have to face a turbulent legislature and a no-confidence motion. The total breakdown of law and order discredited the Governor as well and to some extent cast aspersions on the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, himself. When Wavell came to Calcutta on 26 August 1946 he faced a black-flag demonstration by League workers and Muslim National Guards who shouted that he was responsible for this tragedy.<sup>58</sup>

Wavell was visibly moved by this demonstration and by his talk with League leaders in Bengal. This was responsible, many held, for a shift in his attitude towards the League<sup>59</sup> and he made a determined effort to bring it into the Interim Government which it joined in October 1946. As a sequel to this, Frederick Burrows, Governor of Bengal, also attempted to install a coalition government in Bengal.<sup>60</sup> Thirdly, Suhrawardy was motivated by the idea of a more representative transitional government and wanted sincerely the co-operation

who had refused to allow him to establish a coalition ministry in Bengal unless there was a satisfactory coalition at the Centre. Perhaps he trusts Suhrawardy as little as I do ... Suhrawardy was obviously very worried. I dislike and distrust him intensely. I have always thought him a dishonest, self-seeking careerist with no principles. I think Jinnah is worried too, but he seems as intransigent as ever." Moon, n. 44, p. 348. Also see Menon, n. 30, p. 306.

57. The author's interview with Abul Hashim, Dacca, 18 July 1972.

58. *Star of India*, 26 August 1946; *Azad*, 27 August 1946.

59. Menon, n. 30, p. 301.

60. Moon, n. 44, p. 370.

of the Congress.<sup>61</sup> When the Congress and the League could not come to terms at the all-India level Suhrawardy wanted the Bengal League and the Congress to work together in order to create confidence in the Hindu mind and dispel their fear about the concept of grouping as envisaged in the Cabinet Mission Plan. Perhaps in it were inherent the germs of his future plan of an independent sovereign Bengal. Whether he was losing heart because of the attitude of the All India League leaders towards the Bengal League leaders and Bengal Muslims or whether he only wanted to protect the interests of Bengal Muslims he did come around to the idea that the solution of Bengal's problems lay in the growth of the politics of Hindu-Muslim unity—and was convinced that more harm would be done by the sort of communalism that had already been demonstrated by both communities during the Calcutta riots.<sup>62</sup>

It has been said earlier that Suhrawardy never quite fitted in the Jinnah frame of leadership. Perhaps Jinnah realized that,

61. Earlier when he formed a ministry in Bengal in April 1946 he also explored the possibility of forming a coalition Government with the Congress leaders and it is alleged that the Congress High Command did not agree to it. Muhammad Waliullah, *Yug Bichitra* (Dacca, 1967), p. 487.

62. In tune with this move were his efforts to resolve the deadlock between Jinnah and the Viceroy which ensued after the rejection by the Council of the All India Muslim League the Cabinet Mission Plan. In September 1946 Suhrawardy took the initiative for a *rapprochement* between these two and met Jinnah in Bombay; the result was that the Viceroy decided to ask Jinnah to see him and to make another effort to get him into the Constituent Assembly. Obviously the reason for Suhrawardy's going to Bombay was to persuade Jinnah and he also discussed his plan for a coalition government. After meeting the Viceroy on 8 September 1946 he issued a statement in Delhi appealing to Nehru and the Congress leaders to take a 'bold leap' and to cooperate with the Muslim League before the "chasm yawn too wide to be bridged". He maintained that if the Congress came forward Jinnah would be satisfied with something less than his present demands. The statement issued within three days after meeting Jinnah (6 September) and the Viceroy (8 September) gives credence to the view that he had the authority to issue such a statement. Jinnah met Viceroy on 16 September and the parleys culminated in the Muslim League joining the Interim Government on 26 October 1946. Ragib Ahsan, 'Suhrawardy', *Ittefaq* Special Issue Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, Dacca, March 1946, p. 21; *The Statesman*, 10 September 1946.

after Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardy alone of all Bengal League leaders enjoyed maximum support of the middle class Bengali Muslims and could reach the stature of provincial leader and pose danger to the position that Jinnah himself enjoyed in provincial Muslim politics. Jinnah was determined not to repeat the mistake he had made with Fazlul Huq. And when he chose the Muslim League's nominee in the Interim Government he selected Jogendra Nath Mandal from Bengal and not a Bengal League leader. It is not the intention here, however, to interpret Jinnah's selection of Mandal in terms of the leadership struggle between Suhrawardy and Jinnah. Also the latter's climb-down from the position of claiming the League as the only representative organization of a separate Muslim nation to its being the spokesman of minority interests (this being the obvious conclusion from the inclusion of a Scheduled Caste member as a Muslim League nominee) was a counter-move to the challenge thrown by the Congress when it selected a Muslim as a Congress nominee in the Interim Government.<sup>63</sup> However, the fact remains that Jinnah discarded Suhrawardy and other Bengal League leaders. He did not select even an Assam Muslim leader. That the Muslim leaders from Bengal and Assam did not count much in the counsel of Jinnah or the All India Muslim League was proved by this. Even conceding the fact that Jinnah wanted to show that the Muslim League could speak on behalf of all minorities he could very well have chosen a Scheduled Caste nominee from out of the other 4 seats given to North Indian Muslims. Jinnah's step was not appreciated by the Bengal League leaders. Even Nazimuddin was unhappy. Suhrawardy characterized this dictatorial discretion of Jinnah as "an injustice to Bengal". Nazimuddin said it was a "poor show".<sup>64</sup> Jinnah's arbitrary move appeared strange to Nazimuddin and convinced him that he was also not in Jinnah's mind as Bengal's representative in the Interim Government.

63. The discussion held between the Viceroy and Jinnah from 12 October to 15 October 1946 when Jinnah decided that the Muslim League should join the Interim Government would bear out this point. Menon, n. 30, pp. 314-15.

64. Waliullah, n. 65, p. 521.

The Muslim press did not criticize Jinnah's action although the Hindu press in Bengal made a lot of noise.<sup>65</sup> Instead the Muslim press acclaimed it. *Millat*, the spokesman of the progressive section of the Muslim League, in an article on "Whither Caste Hindus and Congress" said that the fascist Caste Hindu leadership in Bengal was outraged at the idea that the Muslim League did not side-track the Scheduled Castes of India and included one of the leaders of the Scheduled Castes Federation in the Interim Government.<sup>66</sup> The weekly claimed that it strongly demonstrated the ideals for which the League was fighting, that the interests of the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes were identical and that both communities had been reduced by the Caste Hindus to a pitiable condition. This made them to cooperate with each other in their fight against the fascist Caste Hindu domination. That was, the paper explained, why the Scheduled Castes Federation had joined the Suhrawardy ministry earlier.

#### IV

With these developments in the background it was not surprising when Abul Hashim and Sarat Chandra Bose entered

65. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 15 October and 16 October 1946, *Dainik Hindustan*, the mouthpiece of Hindu Mahasabha, 28 November 1946.

66. *Millat* first appeared as a weekly in 1945 under the joint auspices of Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy. The main reason behind starting it was in the words of Kazi Mohammad Idris, its editor during those years, that all the Muslim newspapers, *Star of India* and *Morning News* (in English) and *Azad* and *Weekly Mohammadi* (in Bengali, both owned by Maulana Akram Khan) were owned by the rightist group in the Bengal Muslim League and never reflected the views of the progressive section. The policies followed by the above papers went against their interests and they felt the urgent need of a news media to create Muslim public opinion when Abul Hashim was fighting to make the League organization broad-based and democratic in Bengal. The 1946 provincial election was fought through this weekly. The author's interview with Kazi Mohammad Idris, Dacca, 27 June 1972.

into group discussion about the future of the province in early 1947.<sup>67</sup>

The initiators of the move for an independent Bengal were Sarat Bose and Abul Hashim and not Suhrawardy. During January 1947 Abul Hashim and Sarat Bose held a number of meetings to discuss the future of India as well as future of the provinces.<sup>68</sup> Abul Hashim met leaders of the Azad Hind Fauj and the main discussions centred around the question as to how "to forge a united front against British imperialism" and how "to achieve the independence of the entire Indian sub-continent consisting of Hindustan and Pakistan" from the British.<sup>69</sup> Though none of them issued any statements, *Swadhinata*, the newspaper of the Communist Party, published a report on this issue towards the end of January saying that the decision was for Greater Bengal.<sup>70</sup> Abul Hashim issued

67. After Subhas Bose's ouster from Congress leadership the Congress in Bengal split into two, official Congress and Congress (Bose Group). Sarat Bose was the leader of the second faction till his arrest on 11 December 1941. After his release in September 1945 Sarat Bose was elected to the Central Assembly in December 1945. The Congress Parliamentary Party in the Central Assembly elected him as leader on 19 January 1946 and he became the leader of opposition. He joined Nehru's Interim Government in September 1946 and was asked to resign in October 1946 in order to make room for League nominees when the League decided to join the Interim Government. It was regarded as an insult to Bengal leaders by a section of the Bengal Congress. Sarat Bose resigned from the Working Committee on 6 January 1947 as he could not agree to its resolution which recommended to the AICC the acceptance of His Majesty Government's declaration of 6 December 1946, making regrouping of provinces under the Cabinet Mission's Plan compulsory.

68. Abul Hashim maintained that after his rejection by the Congress High Command Sarat Bose thought about united Bengal. This may be arguable. Sarat Bose mooted the idea of a united Bengal out of conviction which would be borne out by the statement he issued at Calcutta on 20 April 1946. He said: "I hardly need say that if any proposals are made for the vivisection of Bengal or of the Punjab they will be seriously resisted". *Indian Annual Register*, 1946, vol. I, January-June, p. 51.

69. Statement issued by Abul Hashim, *Millat*, 31 January 1947.

70. Ibid. Abul Hashim mentioned that, on being invited by Sarat Bose, he gave a talk at the annual dinner of INA when he was accompanied by his son Badruddin Umar and Shamsuddin Ahmed of Munshiganj. The latter, he said, leaked the information to *Swadhinata* and it came out with

a statement contradicting this and clarified that the discussion was absolutely friendly and they talked about the present political problems and the future of Bengal and India and also about the attitudes of the political parties. *Azad*, in an editorial, warned Abul Hashim that as secretary of the League his duty was only to implement its policy. Policy matters and decisions about the future of the Muslim nation or Muslim Bengal were outside his jurisdiction and "the Muslim nation has entrusted this responsibility to Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah with utmost dependence."<sup>71</sup>

Two propositions could be deduced from the above discussion. That it marked the beginning of an attempt by the leaders of Bengal to seek a solution outside the aegis of the British Government and by a mutually arrived decision between the leaders of the two parties. Secondly, the fact that the discussion started before the Hindu demand for the partition of Bengal, emphatically refutes the allegation that the League leaders in Bengal were brought to their senses only when they were faced with realities by coming to know what would be "the League portion of Pakistan if it persists in its demand."<sup>72</sup>

Following the British Government's declaration on 20 February 1947, the Hindu Mahasabha demanded the partition of Bengal. It was immediately echoed in the Hindu press and the partition controversy came to the forefront. Akhil Dutta, a veteran Congress leader, was perhaps the first to lodge his protest against it and sent a telegram to Sardar Patel saying that "partition of Bengal is fundamentally wrong on all grounds, political, economic, cultural, linguistic, social. It is outcome of defeatist mentality and is misconceived remedy against communal

the news that Abul Hashim held talks with leaders of Azad Hind Fauj about Greater Bengal. The author's interview with Abul Hashim, Dacca, 18 July 1972.

71. *Azad* editorial: "Do not trespass your jurisdiction", 1 February 1947. Akram Khan, editor, vehemently criticized Abul Hashim saying that Hashim's indomitable desire to get appreciation as a progressive politician in the opposite camp (meaning the Hindu Congress) made him enter into negotiations. This showed, he said, like earlier occasions that Hashim did not have unflinched loyalty to the League organization.

72. Sardar Patel to K.C. Neogy dated 13 May 1947. Durga Das, n. 40, vol. 1V, p. 39.



Government in Bengal<sup>73</sup>". In his letter to Gandhiji he elaborated his fears further. "Partition," he wrote, "will inevitably lead a section of well-to-do Hindus to migrate to West Bengal; leaving the poorer caste Hindus and scheduled caste Hindus behind." He contended that the movement seemed to be a communal one. "Communalism must no doubt be fought, but not by a counter-communal movement for a homeland for the Hindus . . ." and it seemed, he prophesied, that it "is bound at no distant date to be replaced by political division on economic grounds."<sup>74</sup>

Thus the ball was set rolling on the question of the partition of Bengal. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* opened a forum inviting readers' views on the question. "The Muslim insistence on Pakistan, undefined, but looking like taking the shape of a theocratic state", the paper commented, "has alarmed the Hindus of Bengal where a Muslim Ministry based on a communal electorate is in saddle and busy consolidating power in the interest of one community alone. The protagonists of the division argue that it is the only way to preserve the cultural and political ideals of Bengal Hindus while the opponents of the idea counter it by saying that it betrays a defeatist mentality and division will mean the break-up of the unity of the Bengali race."<sup>75</sup> The first feeling is reflected in the resolution passed by the executive committee of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee on 4 April 1947. "If His Majesty's Government resolved handing over its power to the existing Government of Bengal, which is determined to the formation of Bengal into a separate sovereign state and which by its composition is a communal party, such portions of Bengal as are desirous of remaining within the Union of India should be allowed to remain so. . . ."<sup>76</sup> Shyama

73. Ibid., p. 30

74. Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase* (Ahmedabad, 1958), vol. II, p. 178.

75. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, editorial, 27 February 1947.

76. Ibid., 5 April 1947. Eleven members of the Constituent Assembly from Bengal submitted a memorandum to Mountbatten on 11 April asking constitution of a "separate autonomous province in West and North Bengal within the Indian Union", and "two regional administrations with separate ministries under a common governor" as a transitional arrangement. Ibid., 12 April 1947.

Prasad went a step further when he wrote to Patel saying "Even if a loose centre as contemplated under the Cabinet Mission Scheme is established, we shall have no safety whatsoever in Bengal. We demand the creation of two provinces out of the present boundaries of Bengal—Pakistan or no Pakistan."<sup>77</sup> N.C. Chatterjee presiding over the Provincial Hindu Conference declared that "the Hindus of Bengal must constitute a separate province under a strong national government. It was not a question of partition but one of life and death of Hindus."<sup>78</sup>

The West Bengal leaders were afraid that even if entire Bengal agreed to join the Indian Union "it would be more or less the continuation of the present state of affairs and the idea we have of securing in Bengal a base for nationalism will be completely frustrated." This was impossible to achieve, "unless we have the administration in our hands,"<sup>79</sup> However, there was no denying the fact that Pakistan was not the demand of Hindus and they were opposed to it in any form.

While the Hindu mind was agitating over the question of partition of Bengal, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* decided on a *Gallup Poll* in order "to make a correct estimate of public opinion" about the controversy that had been raging for some time past over the question of the creation of a separate homeland for Bengal Hindus.<sup>80</sup> The result it declared of this *Gallup Poll* claimed 98.3 per cent in favour of partition and only 0.6 per cent against.<sup>81</sup> "That is the achievement of Mr. Suhrawardy" *Hindustan Times* commented on this episode.<sup>82</sup>

Many a Muslim leader sincerely felt that if Pakistan meant the partition of Bengal into two parts, and domination of Bengal Muslims by Muslims from the West, then

77. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee to Sardar Patel dated 11 May 1947. Durga Das, n. 40, p. 40.

78. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 5 April 1947.

79. B.C. Sinha, Assistant Secretary, Bengal Congress Assembly Party, and Member, Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, to Patel, 5 June 1947. Durga Das, n. 40, p. 53.

80. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 23 March 1947.

81. *Ibid.*, 23 April 1947.

82. Quoted in *ibid.*, 26 April 1947.

an independent status of Bengal outside Pakistan was a desirable proposition preferable to Pakistan. Mohammed Ali, the Finance Secretary, while presenting the budget in the Bengal Assembly on 28 February 1947, analysed the financial position of Bengal and concluded that an independent Bengal free from the Centre's interference could make good economic progress.<sup>83</sup> He argued that the cash crops, i.e., jute and tea, if exported could bring economic stability to Bengal. Suhrawardy's persistent efforts to form a coalition Government in Bengal with the Congress after the demand for partition was raised in a section of the Hindu press, also shows the direction in which he was moving. "The time has definitely come", he declared "when one party rule should be revised in Bengal and other provinces."<sup>84</sup> He suggested that the Government should be formed with all the communities which, he felt, was the prerequisite of getting freedom. However, Suhrawardy did not get any support in this move from the president of the Bengal League. *Azad* in its editorials "All Parties Ministry" and "Proposal for Coalition" warned the Premier that it was nothing but madness to suggest a coalition government in the existing atmosphere which was full of hate, and reminded him that it did not behove him to make such a suggestion about which only the All India League leadership could take a decision.<sup>85</sup>

However, to a section of League leaders the question of partition of Bengal came as a shock. Akram Khan's oft-quoted statement that partition of Bengal could be effected only on his dead body was borne out by this feeling. Fazlur Rahman, the Minister of Land Revenue & Jail, reminded Hindus "of the step-motherly treatment which Bengal had hitherto received at the hands of the Central Government while other provinces have developed their commerce, industry and education at the cost of Bengal with the help of the Centre."<sup>86</sup> If the Hindus felt, he asked, that "their culture, language and civilization which it is now revealed to them are separate from

83. *Azad*, 1 March 1947.

84. *The Statesman*, 8 March 1947.

85. *Azad*, editorials, 17 March and 20 March 1947.

86. *Morning News*, 9 April 1947.

those of Muslims and can be saved by carving out another state comprising some districts of West Bengal, why should they not solve the problem . . . by exchange of population?"

The prospect of partition drew the first public protest from Sarat Bose. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* commented on 16 March 1947: "His was the lone voice decrying the proposal for partition." Sarat Bose issued a statement saying that the cry of partition of Bengal "is the result of defeatist mentality."<sup>87</sup> It was followed by Suhrawardy's statement wherein he said that "Bengal belonged to Bengalees and it was indivisible."<sup>88</sup> Hindus, however, did not take favourably to it and asked Suhrawardy "to carefully ponder the reasons that have forced Bengal Hindus to insist on having a separate homeland for themselves."<sup>89</sup>

The proposal for partition took a new dimension when the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and the Provincial Hindu Conference simultaneously voiced the demand that there should be regional ministries in the interim period or that the new provinces must be formed before transfer of power.<sup>90</sup> In the wake of this Suhrawardy made an appeal to Hindus for "a united Bengal and a greater Bengal."<sup>91</sup> Though he did not spell out how he visualized "a united Bengal," he lamented that the gentlemen who had taken up the question of

87. Sarat Bose issued the following statement: "I think I ought to raise my voice of protest and sound a note of warning against the resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee with reference to division of the Punjab into two provinces—one predominantly Muslim and other predominantly non-Muslim. In the course of Press interview, the Congress President has announced that the principle of division underlying the resolution applies also to Bengal. . . . By accepting religion as the sole basis of the distribution of provinces, the Congress has sent itself away from its national moorings and has almost undone the work it has been doing for the last 60 years. . . . To my mind a division of provinces on the religious basis is no solution of the communal problem."

88. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 19 March 1947.

89. *Ibid.*, editorial.

90. The guarantee which the Hindu Mahasabha Conference suggested to the 30 per cent non-Muslims in East Bengal was that "they will have the sanction, not simply moral, but in certain eventualities also physical of the new Government of West Bengal". *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 8 April 1947.

91. *The Statesman*, 10 April 1947.

partition of Bengal were masters of propaganda and they would beguile even well-meaning Hindus into supporting them. Out of sheer frustration perhaps he said : "But I hope, some day reason will prevail and before they cut their nose to spite their face they will make a sincere attempt . . . and that all of us pull together to make Bengal a great country and Bengalees a greater nation." This he said before the idea of a sovereign independent Bengal was mooted by him. In April 1947 speculation was high and the situation fluid. The picture was not clear as to what the British were going to do. Jinnah, it was reported, suggested to the Viceroy to transfer power to the Provincial Governments instead of the Central Government as an alternative to Pakistan for the present.<sup>92</sup> Commenting on this *Morning News* emphasized that what Muslims wanted was transfer of full, sovereign power to the existing Provincial Government in the North-East and North-West parts of India.<sup>93</sup> This perhaps gave hope to Suhrawardy and impressed upon him the necessity of coming to terms with Hindus on the question of the unity of Bengal. That he was eager to have an understanding with the Congress and Hindus in Bengal on the question of ministry formation and the administration was beyond doubt. When ultimately the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee refused to have any truck with the Muslim League and demanded the partition and a transitional regional ministry, both Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim made a sincere and earnest effort to make Bengal independent and sovereign.

However, Suhrawardy's statement on the Pakistan Day on 22 March 1947 at the Muslim Institute Hall, saying that there would be no more need to observe such a day next year as Pakistan would be achieved before that date, put his *bona fides* about a sovereign Bengal in doubt. How he could so quickly shift his stand, Hindus wondered ! In view of the conflicting analyses which could be deduced from Suhrawardy's different statements it is difficult to say how the idea originated in his mind. But it can be definitely said that he wanted

92. *Star of India*, 13 April 1947.

93. *Morning News*, 18 April 1947.

to avert Bengal's partition and take the whole of Bengal out of India.

Concrete steps towards an agreement between the Muslim League leaders and Congress leaders began to be taken immediately after the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee adopted the above resolution. Nazimuddin issued a press statement on 22 April saying that an independent sovereign Bengal according to him was in the best interests of Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants of Bengal.<sup>94</sup> That the League leaders seriously set to work out a plan could be perceived from the above statement. Within a week both Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy came out with appeals in the Press, one in Calcutta and the other in Delhi.<sup>95</sup>

The point of emphasis in Suhrawardy's statement was that the future of Bengal should be left to its people<sup>96</sup> and not to the "contending factions of all India importance" who were in the midst of the struggle.<sup>97</sup> That he was expecting the provincial arrangement in the British scheme of final transfer of power is evident from the following. "An entirely different state of circumstances will arise when each province will have to look after itself and when each province is sure to get practical, if not total, independence, and the people of Bengal will have to rely upon each other."<sup>98</sup> However, while answering newsmen's questions he said that though for the present he was concerned about Bengal, at one time he was prone to think about independent status of each of the provinces and also of the Indian States. The reasons he gave for this were more clear than those

94. *Star of India*, 22 April 1947. Nazimuddin issued another statement which appeared in *Millat*, 9 May 1947, saying that the establishment of an independent sovereign Bengal was the ultimate aim of Bengal Muslims.

95. Suhrawardy's press statement in New Delhi on 27 April 1947, *Morning News*, 28 April 1947; *Hindu* (Madras), 29 April 1947; *Azad*, 28, 29 April 1947. Also see S. Hussain, *Days Decisive* (Dacca, 1970), Appendix A. Abul Hashim's press statement on 29 April 1947, *Millat* (Weekly), 2 May 1947; *Azad*, 1 May 1947. See Appendix IX for extracts from these two statements.

96. *Morning News*, 28 April 1947. Suhrawardy's answers to the questions asked during press interview.

97. Suhrawardy's press statement, see Appendix IX A.

98. *Ibid.*

of the Congress leaders. He said, "You cannot impose a federation from the top. What is really needed is basic autonomous states. . . each unit voluntarily gives up some rights on its own for the benefit of the federation. . . you have got to build up from the bottom and not impose from the top and say you shall give up certain powers."

Suhrawardy assured Hindus that under the set of circumstances which would emerge when Bengal became independent, a ministry "which will not be composed of all the important elements of its society or which can be a communal party ministry"<sup>99</sup> could not exist in Bengal. Though Noakhali was often cited by Hindus as an indication of the things to come in the future independent Bengal, Suhrawardy reminded them that in other parts where Muslims were in a comfortable majority nothing had happened. He assured them that he was prepared to go "very very far indeed to meet the wishes of Hindus in Bengal."<sup>100</sup>

Whereas Suhrawardy talked about the unreasonableness of the demand for Bengal's partition and viability of the new State, Abul Hashim demanded a sovereign Bengal in the name of the Pakistan resolution only.<sup>101</sup> "That resolution never contemplated," he stated, "the creation of any Akhand Muslim State or any artificial Muslim majority either by forcible importation of alien elements as is being done in Palestine or by any mass transference of population as was done between Turkey and Greece." It was a challenge to the Pakistan demand as Jinnah understood it in 1947 and at the same time it was a measure of the difference between the leadership of Abul Hashim and that of Suhrawardy. Although the former had nothing to lose in case the movement failed, the latter had staked everything on the demand for a sovereign Bengal. It must be, however, conceded that Abul Hashim spoke more categorically in terms of self-determination of Muslims of Bengal than Suhrawardy. The Lahore resolution, he said, "demands complete sovereignty for those countries which are known to the world as Muslim majority countries."<sup>102</sup>

99. Ibid.

100. *Morning News*, 30 April 1947.

101. Statement of Abul Hashim, *ibid.* See Appendix IX B.

102. Ibid.

Abul Hashim, in a way, had gauged the Hindu mind better than Suhrawardy. "The Hindus of Bengal have developed a suspicion complex," he said, "from 10 years of one party Muslim ministry."<sup>103</sup> He told Muslims: "Since reasonably or otherwise there is a suspicion on the part of Hindus against them, it is now upto Muslims to clear the deck and convince them. . .by action that they do not mean to be unfair to them." Both Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy made a clear offer to Hindu leaders, the former going to the extent of offering 50:50 sharing of political power and economic privileges. The ball, therefore, was now in the court of the Hindu leaders of Bengal.

## V

Sarat Bose and Kiran Shankar Roy were among the renowned Congress leaders who responded to this offer. Sarat Bose's Secretary, Satya Ranjan Bakshi, was actively involved. The Hindu leaders responded initially outside the aegis of the Congress. Immediately after Suhrawardy came back from New Delhi on 28 April 1947, negotiations started among these leaders. The seriousness of the Muslim League leaders can be realized from the fact that after the first round of preliminary talks between Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim and Sarat Bose, the working committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League at its meeting on 3 May appointed a regular sub-committee of six to negotiate with the Hindu leaders on the question of the future constitution of Bengal.<sup>104</sup>

This meeting, held under the presidentship of Akram Khan, authorized Nurul Amin, the Speaker, and five others to contact Hindu leaders to devise a plan and method to save the province from worse consequences arising out of "fratricidal strife," and by another resolution appointed a committee consisting of Suhrawardy, Fazlur Rahman, Nurul Amin, Habibullah Bahar Chowdhury, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury and Yusuf Ali Chowdhury to negotiate with Hindus about the future constitution of Bengal.<sup>105</sup>

103. Ibid.

104. *The Statesman*, 4 May 1947.

105. *Morning News*, 4 May 1947.



Although the initiative for a positive step towards a possible agreement about the future of Bengal was taken by the League leaders, the differences were quite clear right from the beginning. Two sub-streams of thought followed from this effort. One expectation was that efforts should be made to avert partition while staying within Pakistan. To that extent negotiations with the Hindu leaders within the framework of Pakistan were not unwelcome to this section. To them it meant giving a constitutional guarantee to the Hindu minority in order to lure them away from the path of partition of Bengal. Akram Khan issued a statement immediately after the meeting of the working committee. "I strongly deprecate the suggestion that in order to counter the partition move," he said, "Bengal should dissociate herself from other Pakistan areas."<sup>106</sup> While insisting that Muslims of India constituted a single united nation, he rejected the idea of a Bengali nation comprising Muslims and Hindus. "Those who talk of a Bengali nation consisting of Muslims and Hindus and a separate sovereign Bengal upon that basis are clearly playing into the hands of our enemies. . . ."

The second sub-stream was that the option for an independent Bengal had perforce to be considered against the demand for one Pakistan. According to this section, if Pakistan meant getting Eastern Bengal minus Calcutta then "independent sovereign Eastern Pakistan"<sup>107</sup> or "Azad Pakistan", where Muslim by virtue of their numerical strength would be the dominant power, should be aspired for rather than one Pakistan which would lead to the division of Bengal. To this section the idea of an independent Bengal would have prevented Hindus from demanding partition.

To a microscopic section of the group led by Abul Hashim, however, the demand for an independent Bengal was strictly according to the Lahore Resolution and therefore it was the Pakistan demand of Bengal Muslims. To them it was a movement for an independent status of Bengal where Muslims and Hindus would enjoy equal power and privileges. However, none

106. *Star of India*, 4 May 1947; *Azad*, 5 May 1947.

107. Statement issued by Ali Ahmed Khan, MLA, *Star of India*, 25 May 1947.

of the leaders in the latter groups spelt out the nature of the sovereign Bengal they envisaged.

Akram Khan continued his opposition to the idea of a sovereign Bengal, independent of Pakistan in the West.<sup>108</sup> However, the sub-committee carried on negotiations with Sarat Bose, Kiran Shankar Roy and Satya Ranjan Bakshi and tentative proposals were discussed at a number of meetings. In the beginning it was agreed by both parties that the proposals could be finalised only after approval by Gandhi and Jinnah and whatever was agreed upon would have to be approved by the working committee of the Provincial League and the High Commands of both the Congress and the League.<sup>109</sup> The proposals in fact remained all through in the discussion stage and were never really finalized.

The Hindu and Muslim leaders availed themselves of the opportunity of Gandhi's presence in Bengal to discuss the proposals with him.<sup>110</sup> Sarat Bose was the first to visit Gandhi on 9 May and he went alone. Whether there was a hitch in the League sub-committee was not beyond speculation<sup>111</sup> as

108. In a number of editorials in *Azad*, Akram Khan gave vent to his views. *Azad*, 6 May, 20 May, 24 May 1947. "The basis of Pakistan is that Muslims are a separate nation from Hindus. Hence the ideal of Indian nationalism or Bengali nationalism, including Hindus and Muslims of Bengal, Muslims cannot accept. But it is highly lamentable that recently some leaders are speaking in such terms which only are helping the opposite party." Making a scathing attack on Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy, it said that "someone on the basis of undivided Bengali nationalism is busy in laying the foundation of an independent sovereign Bengal, the other is making the proposal of forming a Greater Bengal." "Muslims in Bengal had not fought for Pakistan for getting 50:50 share in a sovereign Bengal. This was available earlier also. What they wanted was a sovereign Muslim State in Bengal."

109. *Morning News*, 9 May 1947. The working committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League held a meeting on 8 May and passed a resolution. Statement of Fazlur Rahman dated 8 May 1947, *Star of India*, 8, 9 May 1947.

110. For a detailed account of the visits and talks of these leaders with Gandhi in Sodepur, see Pyarelal, n. 74, vol. II, pp. 176-90.

111. After this development Akram Khan and other League leaders' opposition to a sovereign Bengal became more stringent. It seemed Akram Khan succeeded in converting 3 out of 6 sub-committee members to his viewpoint when he took them to Delhi following Suhrawardy to have discussion with Jinnah.

Suhrawardy came to Gandhi accompanied by Mohammed Ali and not by any other member of the sub-committee.

Gandhi contended that whether the unity of Bengal could be maintained or not would depend on how far Muslims and their leaders could remove the fear and suspicion that had seized the Hindu mind. This, Gandhi felt, "was at the root of the partition fever."<sup>112</sup> Gandhi impressed upon Suhrawardy that only a change of heart in his own conduct and in the conduct of his administration and not mere words could bring confidence to the Hindu mind, and his labours therefore should be directed towards that end.

Immediately after his talks with Gandhi, Suhrawardy went to Delhi to discuss the matter with the Viceroy and Jinnah and met them on 14 May and 15 May respectively. The hitch in the League sub-committee had become quite clear by this time. Those who supported the move for negotiations with Hindus were startled at the idea of a sovereign Bengal delinked from Pakistan and came down heavily on Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim. "The puny men who talk of a sovereign Bengal with no connection with the Pakistan national state," commented the League paper, "do not know what they were talking about . . . they are . . . liquidating their own political existence."<sup>113</sup> It warned that if out of imperial necessity the British departed after dismembering "our territory," then the only way left would be "a war to re-annex those parts that may be torn away from our national state Pakistan." To this section the opposition to partition meant the inclusion of entire Bengal in Pakistan. Whether this section made any effort to keep Bengal in Pakistan is perhaps debatable. Though Akram Khan immediately followed Suhrawardy to Delhi with Habibullah Bahar Chowdhury, Nurul Amin and Yusuf Ali Chowdhury, their mission was more in the nature of forestalling the efforts of Suhrawardy than to impress upon Jinnah the logic and feelings of Muslims of Bengal over the question of keeping Bengal intact and avoiding partition. From now on Akram Khan and his group, i.e. the parliamentary League leadership in Bengal, threw their whole weight

112. Pyarelal, n. 74, p. 181-2.

113. *Morning News*, editorial. 15 May 1947.

against the move for an independent sovereign Bengal though at the same time they opposed its partition. Interviewed by the Oriental Press of India in Delhi on 18 May, Akram Khan said, "I assure every one concerned with the question of partition that Muslims of Bengal will fight against it united like a solid rock" and that "partition of Bengal can be effected only on the corpses of Muslim Bengal."<sup>114</sup>

What transpired between Jinnah and these two groups of Bengal leaders is not clearly known. Jinnah's reaction to this idea is only a guess. That Jinnah was not totally averse to it could however be seen from the statements issued by Suhrawardy and also by the other group. Suhrawardy denied that the League High Command had turned down his ideas; he, however, admitted that the purpose of his mission was not over and that he would again visit Delhi shortly. Making a pointed reference to Akram Khan's efforts, he said, "There are undoubtedly fissiparous tendencies, but all of us Hindus and Muslims have got to come together when the atmosphere becomes more healthy. . . . We have to evolve a *modus operandi* where neither section will be afraid of the other and will have confidence in each other." The other group claimed that they knew "the views of the Quaid-e-Azam" regarding the problem facing the Bengal Muslim League and said that the confusion created by unauthorized negotiations had now been clarified.<sup>115</sup> They were perhaps referring to the continuous discussions which Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy were having independent of them.

Sarat Bose and Kiran Shankar Roy continued their lone effort. They reached an agreement with the League leaders in a conference on 20 May 1947 at Sarat Bose's house.<sup>116</sup> The

114. *Star of India*, 19 May 1947, *The Statesman*, 20 May 1947.

115. The statement issued by Habibullah Bahar Chowdhury on 19 May 1947. *Morning News*, 20 May 1947, *The Hindu*, 21 May 1947.

116. Sarat Bose reported to Gandhi, "We arrived at a tentative agreement, a copy of which is enclosed herewith for your consideration. For purpose of identification, it was signed by Abul Hashim and myself in the presence of others. It will, of course, have to be placed before the Congress and Muslim League organizations. From the trend of the discussions we had, it seems to me that so far as the Congress and Muslim League organisations in Bengal are concerned, the tentative agreement will be ratified with them, possibly with some modifications here and there..." Pyarelal, n. 74, p. 185.

conference was attended by Suhrawardy, Fazlur Rahman, Mohammed Ali, Abul Hashim and Mallik on behalf of the Muslim League. The other side was represented by Sarat Bose, Kiran Shankar Roy and Satya Ranjan Bakshi. The absence of other leaders of the League sub-committee was conspicuous. This was followed by another sitting in the next few days. The concrete proposals emerging out of these discussions were:<sup>117</sup>

1. Bengal will be a free state. The free State of Bengal will decide its relations with the rest of India.
2. The constitution of the free State of Bengal will provide for election to the Bengal legislature on the basis of joint electorate and adult franchise, with reservation of seats proportionate to the population amongst Hindus and Muslims. The seats as between Hindus and Scheduled Caste Hindus will be distributed amongst them in proportion to their respective population or in such manner as may be agreed among them. The constituencies will be multiple constituencies and the votes will be distributive and not cumulative. A candidate who gets the majority of the votes of his own community cast during the elections and 25 per cent of the votes of the other communities will be declared elected. If no candidate satisfies these conditions the candidate who gets the largest number of votes of his own community will be elected.
3. On the announcement of His Majesty's Government that the proposal of a free State of Bengal has been accepted and that Bengal will not be partitioned, the present Bengal ministry will be dissolved and a new interim ministry brought into being consisting of an

117. Millat, 23 May 1947, *The Statesman*, 23 May, 24 May, 27 May 1947, *The Hindu*, 24 May 1947. In the editorial "Life or Death" in *Millat*, the editor (Abul Hashim) made an appeal to Hindus and Muslims of Bengal saying that the British Government would announce their proposal on 2 June and before that Muslims and Hindus of Bengal should announce their decision from each housetop. In the following week's editorial, "Bengal's Public Opinion," on 30 May the editor commented that the people of Bengal, particularly its youth, had expressed their support in favour of these proposals.

- equal number of Muslims and Hindus (including Scheduled Caste Hindus), but excluding the chief minister. In this ministry the chief minister will be a Muslim and the home minister a Hindu.
4. Pending the final emergence of a legislature and a ministry under the new constitution, Hindus (including Scheduled Caste Hindus) and Muslims will have an equal share in the services, including the military and the police. The services will be manned by Bengalis.
  5. A constituent assembly composed of 30 persons, 16 Muslims and 14 non-Muslims will be elected by the Muslim and non-Muslim members of the legislature respectively, excluding the Europeans.<sup>118</sup>

In a press interview, Sarat Bose dealt with the details and implications of the proposals. He said, that if the free state of Bengal came into being, it would be a republic, whose details would be worked out when it had a constituent assembly of its own.<sup>119</sup> He explained, "By the word 'free' I mean freedom not only from political bondage but also freedom from social and economic servitude." The deep distrust between the communities had to be removed, he maintained, otherwise Bengal and India would perish. He pointed out that this was the first time after several decades that the Congress and Muslim League leaders of any province in India had agreed to the introduction of joint electorate and adult franchise.

The analysis of leadership in the Bengal League done earlier<sup>120</sup> showed that the disparity between the pro-Suhrawardy-Abul Hashim elements and the pro-Nazimuddin elements depended on their strict adherence or otherwise to the principles and policies of the All-India Muslim League. The factions were better known, respectively, as liberal Muslim Leaguers with leanings to the left and diehard Muslim Leaguers and

118. Before this conference Fazlur Rahman issued a statement detailing the genesis of the negotiations and the tentative proposals. He was particular to emphasize that the proposals had not yet been agreed to. *Morning News, The Statesman*, 19 May 1947.

119. *The Statesman*, 24 May 1947. See also *I Warned My Countrymen: Being the Collected Works 1945-50 of Sarat Bose*, compiled by Netaji Research Bureau (Calcutta, 1968), p. 188.

120. Please see Chapter VI, p. 186.

not as West Bengal Leaguers and East Bengal Leaguers. The parliamentary leadership headed by Nazimuddin, Shahabuddin and Akram Khan were in the latter group. The Calcutta District League controlled by the non-Bengali Muslim business community represented by Ispahani, Adamji as stated earlier, also belonged to this group.

When the League leadership in Bengal was faced with the demand for its partition as raised by the Hind Mahasabha and favourably responded to by the entire Hindu population of Bengal, both the groups in the Bengal Muslim League agreed on the need to prevent partition and for that purpose to negotiate with the Hindu leaders.

However, the diametrically opposed views of the two factions regarding the future of Bengal also found expression in the movement sponsored by the League supporters which in turn had two streams. After Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim issued their statements towards the end of April, the vocal section in the Calcutta Students League, i.e. pro-Suhrawardy elements, formed themselves into a body as supporters of "Azad Pakistan" with its "s. s. headquarters" at Calcutta. They sent letters to many Congress leaders who demanded partition (mainly members of the executive committee of the Bengal Congress) asking them to desist from making the demand.<sup>121</sup> "Bengal must be an independent, sovereign and united State," claimed the letter, "wherein there will be no distinction of class, creed and religion. But this independent state must be called 'Azad Pakistan' and the Muslims by virtue of their numerical strength will be the dominant power. . . ."<sup>122</sup> The youth of Muslim Bengal were now prepared to sacrifice their last drop of blood to attain and afterwards defend "Pakistan", the letter said.

The call given by Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy for a sovereign Bengal and greater Bengal without defining its credibility in the context of the Pakistan demand by Bengal Muslims created confusion among the rank and file of the

121. Statement by N. Dutta Majumdar, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 May 1947.

122. Letter dated 30 April 1947 received by Dutta Majumdar, from s.s. Headquarters, Azad Pakistan, quoted in Durga Das, n. 40, pp. 36-37.

Muslim League. To their followers it meant that Pakistan in Bengal had to be "Azad Pakistan" i.e. it had to be independent of Pakistan in the West. Abul Hashim took pains to explain in a statement he issued to dispel the doubts about the new state of Bengal which would be a Muslim majority state but not called Pakistan saying, "If a united sovereign Egypt, where there is a mixed population of Muslims, Jews, Christians and others, can be a Pakistan, if a united sovereign Iran can be Pakistan, I fail to appreciate why a united sovereign Bengal, where Muslims are in a majority, should be anti-Pakistan."<sup>123</sup> He pointed out that "the only alternative to a united, sovereign Bengal is partition of the province into Hindu and Muslim zones, with Calcutta as a free city under the control of Britain and her allies."<sup>124</sup> However, besides issuing threatening letters to the Congress leaders which perhaps had been done by a faction of the supporters of the united Bengal move, the saner section in it organized meetings in Calcutta and Dacca in support of this move. Time, however, was short and with the final curtain on the question of partition drawn on 2 June 1947, i.e. within 10 days of the tentative agreement between the negotiating Hindu and Muslim leaders, the efforts were destined to fail.

The other faction in the League leadership which was against Suhrawardy's move also continued its opposition to the partition of Bengal. The Muslim National Guards, who always stood by the League and its discipline, also issued threatening letters to the Congress leaders and workers "demanding them to acquiesce in the wishes of the Muslim League on fear of forfeiture of their lives."<sup>125</sup> They issued leaflets in Bengali—warning the Hindu and Congress leaders that "the loaded pistol is ready to correct them from the path of partition of Bengal and resistance against the creation of Pakistan".<sup>126</sup>

123. Abul Hashim's statement dated 17 May 1947, *Millat*, 23 May 1947; *The Hindu*, 20 May 1947; *Morning News*, 18 May 1947. See also Hussain, n. 95, p. 37.

124. *The Hindu*, 20 May 1947.

125. *Ibid.*, 22 May 1947.

126. Letter dated 8 May 1947. from N. Dutta Majumdar to Patel. Durga Das, n. 40, p. 38.



I.A. Mohajer, *Salar-e-Suba*, Bengal, went to the extent of saying: "Neither the British nor any power in the world has any right to mutilate the Muslim homeland. . . . The history was going to repeat itself and if 17 Muslims could conquer the whole of Bengal, the several crores of Bengal Muslims are more than sufficient to keep Bengal for themselves."<sup>127</sup> The tactics adopted by both factions, one working for a united Bengal with Hindus as willing partners and the other working for the unity of Bengal at any cost, however, were not conducive to the growth of the politics of Hindu-Muslim unity. In view of the divided opinion among the Muslim League leaders about the sovereign status of Bengal, the ill-fated move could not develop into a well-organized movement. And since it was exclusively a League movement (only a few Hindu leaders supported the effort individually), its half-hearted measures can be explained in the words of Abul Hashim: "In the present context of Muslim politics, as even a child knows, Quaid-e-Azam is the only individual who can deliver the goods on behalf of the Muslims of Bengal, Assam, Punjab or Sind, in fact on behalf of the entire Muslims of India."<sup>128</sup> And this, i.e. the future of Bengal, the working committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League on 28 May left in the hands of Quaid-e-Azam. Disowning the negotiated proposals, the resolutions passed by the working committee said *inter alia*:

The working committee places on record that neither the working committee nor the sub-committee appointed by it had anything to do with the proposals that have been published in a certain section of the newspapers for the settlement of the constitution of Bengal.

The working committee stands firmly by the Muslim League demand for Pakistan. The committee reiterates its confidence in the leadership of Quaid-e-Azam M.A. Jinnah and declares that he alone has the authority to negotiate and settle the future constitution on behalf of

127. *Morning News*, 20 May 1947.

128. *The Statesman*, 18 May 1947.

the Muslims of India as a whole and the Muslims of Bengal shall stand by his decision.<sup>129</sup>

Since the Bengal Congress had not officially authorized anyone or set up a body to continue negotiations, a spokesman of the committee said that no useful purpose would be served by continuing the sub-committee set up by the Bengal League. Though this sounded the death-knell of the independent sovereign Bengal scheme, the reasons for its failure lay somewhere else. These reasons can be summarized as, first, total opposition by the Congress leaders, second, riots and third, the gap between the declared objective and profession of the League leaders and their supporters.

The opposition by Patel<sup>130</sup> and Nehru<sup>131</sup> was adamant. Whatever was being done by the provincial leaders was being done on their own responsibility without authorization from the Congress High Command. Unlike Jinnah, who, though he refused to be associated with the move, did not show hostility towards it, the central Congress leaders were totally against it right from the start.

Patel declared his strong views on the question of partition of the provinces in an interview to the Associated Press of America saying that the Congress "will not coerce any group or area which does not want to remain. At the same time it will not be coerced by any group or community. . . . therefore if the Muslim League insists that it wants separation, then the Congress will not compel them to remain by force. But it will result in dividing Bengal and the Punjab. If Bengal and the Punjab provinces as they stand today were put into Pakistan, coercion could come in. Non-Muslims would be forced into Pakistan and there would be a civil war."<sup>132</sup> The "cry of a sovereign independent Bengal is a trap in which even Kiran Shankar may fall with Sarat Babu", he stated while expressing

129. *Star of India*, 29 May 1947; *Morning News*, 30 May 1947.

130. In a number of letters to Bengal Congress leaders, Patel strongly denounced the move. Durga Das, n. 40, pp. 30-50.

131. Gandhi's letter dated 8 June 1947 to Sarat Bose. Pyarelal, n. 74, p. 187.

132. *The Hindu*, 11 May 1947.

his apprehension in a letter written on 13 May 1947 to a Bengal Congress leader.<sup>133</sup> "The only way to save the Hindus of Bengal is to insist on partition of Bengal and to listen to nothing else" was his instruction to the Bengal Congress leaders.<sup>134</sup> He assured them that "the Congress working committee is fully aware of the situation in Bengal. . . . Bengal has got to be partitioned if the non-Muslim population is to survive."<sup>135</sup> Ultimately he sent a warning to Kiran Shankar Roy on 21 May 1947. "It is incumbent on all Congressmen to stand united on the official policy of the Congress. Individual expression of views must fit into that policy and there should not be any discordant note. As a disciplined Congressman, I am sure you will appreciate this advice."<sup>136</sup> Simultaneously in his letter to Sarat Bose he made an appeal saying, "In these critical times, we cannot afford to be sandwiched and must pool our resources and take a united stand."<sup>137</sup> In the settlement of vital matters, he continued, "it behoves all of us to contribute our best to the combined strength of the Congress." Rajendra Prasad in an interview to the Associated Press of America maintained: "We shall not accept division of India at all, if the Muslim League does not agree to the division of the Punjab and Bengal."<sup>138</sup>

The logic behind the High Command's opposition perhaps was the question whether Bengal could be isolated from the Indian Union which would also result in the isolation of Assam.<sup>139</sup> Secondly, whether the High Command was in a position to disown the Congress and also the non-Muslims in Bengal. Whether it was possible to ignore the clamour of the Bengal Congress leaders, who joined hands with the Hindu Mahasabha in demanding partition of the province, is difficult to answer. The partition demand of the provincial Congress leaders only strengthened the hands of the High Command. "It is needless for me to say that all our eyes are turned towards you in the

133. Patel's letter to K.C. Neogy dated 13 May 1947. Durga Das, n. 40, p. 39.

134. Ibid.

135. Patel's letter to B.K. Roy dated 23 May 1947. Ibid., p. 45.

136. Patel's letter to Kiran Shankar Roy, *ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

137. Ibid., p. 44.

138. *The Hindu*, 21 May 1947.

139. Durga Das, n. 40, p. 53.

hope," wrote K.C. Neogy to Patel on 11 May, "that you will not fail to take whatever action is possible to save Bengal and Calcutta from utter ruin."<sup>140</sup> Patel did not require such appeals. The fate of the movement for a sovereign united Bengal had already been sealed.

Although these efforts were doomed to fail, Abul Hashim continued to oppose the move for partition of Bengal and tried to evolve a uniform attitude towards the question among the members from Bengal in the Council of the All India Muslim League. In his last bid he wanted to ensure that they opposed the partition decision at the Council meeting on 9 June 1947 but there also he met with failure and the Council with eleven dissenting voices accepted as a compromise the Mountbatten plan for the transfer of power along with the partition of Bengal and the Punjab. On the eve of this decision a section of Dacca University students ominously warned Jinnah by telegram that in case he accepted partition of their province they would treat him as "traitor" and continue their struggle for the achievement of real Pakistan.<sup>141</sup>

140. Ibid.

141. *Azad*, 9 June 1947.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

During the twentieth century till the creation of Pakistan in 1947 Bengali Muslims went through an agonisingly intense search for a separate identity—to define their political, social and cultural attitudes which would have deep roots in the part of the country where they lived. They joined the movement for Pakistan on the assumption that they would come to power in Eastern India as it was a Muslim majority zone, viable enough to ultimately form an independent sovereign state. Except on the eve of partition when things had gone too far for the process to be reversed, it never crossed their minds that Bengal and Assam would form only a part of Akhand Pakistan as visualised by Jinnah and that they would be dominated, instead of Bengali Hindus, by Muslims of the Western wing of the new state.

Though in a majority position, Muslims in Bengal had for decades remained backward, educationally, economically and socially, compared to Hindus. This was due to the two communities' dissimilar response to the situation that emerged out of British consolidation of power and the policies initiated by the new rulers. While Hindus reacted quickly and favourably to the introduction of English education and other modern ideas, the Muslim aristocracy clung to the traditional studies and ways of living considering these essential for their religion. The comparative poverty of the Muslim masses also contributed to their educational and social backwardness.

By the 1870s, the British themselves got seriously concerned about the extremely slow progress of education among Muslims and took some positive steps to correct the situation. Essentially, however, the Madrassa system with a few modifications was stuck to by Muslims, a situation that persisted well into the 20th century when alone they started realizing the significance of the general education they had not taken advantage of. By this time, however, Hindus were in full cry in the field

of education because of their head start almost a century earlier.

The root cause of the other major disability of the Muslims, economic backwardness, lay in the fact of their being primarily a farming community. Historically it is true, Bengal was ruled by Muslim overlords but the bulk of the Muslim population were poor peasants, who were further hit by the Permanent Settlement. While the peasants were pressed to extreme indebtedness, economic outlets in the form of service with the British Government were foreclosed for Muslims because Hindus seized these opportunities more quickly.

The controversy over the partition of Bengal (1905) made Muslims politically conscious of the fact that they constituted the majority community in the province. They started aspiring that their majority status should be reflected in its administration. Reminding the Government that Muslims formed two-thirds of the population of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Nawab Salimullah of Dacca pointed out that its policy should conform to this undeniable fact. The anti-partition movement, mostly spearheaded by Hindus, therefore, led to strained feelings between the two communities and for the first time the Muslims and Hindus in Bengal were divided on a political issue. The benefits accruing to them from the administration of the new province turned the Muslim educated elite into active supporters of the British rule. The annulment of partition (December 1911) brought back to them the disadvantages they had been suffering in united Bengal. Their leaders continued to seek majority rights for the community from the Government as well as from all-India Muslim leaders. At the same time, the annulment made the younger generation by and large anti-British and from the 1912 onwards led to their greater participation in the freedom struggle and closer co-operation with the Congress till the first mass movement was launched in 1920.

C.R. Das, who was the architect of this co-operation in the legislature, understood the real nature of the Muslim problem in Bengal. His Swarajya Party and the Bengal Pact successfully united the Hindu and Muslim legislators against the British and brought an end to Dyarchy in the province. This and a recrudescence of terrorist activities spelt danger for the

British, both official and non-official, and unnerved the Government which tried, with some success, to drive a wedge between the Hindu and Muslim members of the Swarajya Party.

The constitutional developments, starting with the Simon Commission (1927) and culminating in the Government of India Act 1935, however, created a genuine hope among Bengal Muslims of coming to power. This led to the crystallization of purely Muslim political parties. Earlier, Sir Abdur Rahim's support to the Government during the constitutional crisis, when the Government had been pushed to the corner by Swarajist obstruction, did not help him to build up his position; the Governor did not make him a minister as all the Hindu nominees for ministership refused to serve with him. He perforce turned his attention to building up a Muslim party which neither depended on Government patronage nor on Hindu support.

By this time Muslims in Bengal had completely drawn away from the Congress. Their experience with the all-India Muslim leaders during different parleys in 1928 also made them look inwards and concentrate on Bengal politics. Their economic grievances came to the fore in the context of the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act (1928) when the Hindu members voted for it in toto, while the Muslim members opposed that part of the Bill which contemplated extending some rights to the zamindars. This added to the polarization in Bengal of politics on Hindu-Muslim lines. In 1929 the Muslim leaders formed the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity (the Tenants Party) to fight for the economic rights of the peasantry. Thus there emerged different forces and political groups inside Muslim politics, for all of which the common factor was the motivation to capture power.

In this pursuit of power, the critical element was the ability to carry the electorate. This was more pronouncedly so with the enlarged franchise under the 1935 Act which made every peasant paying six annas (37 paise) as tax a voter. The enfranchisement of the peasantry also brought out the inner contradictions of Muslim politics because while 1935 Act offered prospects of power via polarized Muslim politics, the peasant and the feudal interests ran counter to each other.

It was at this juncture that Jinnah's rejuvenated Muslim League entered Bengal through Muslim business magnates of Calcutta. They entered the political arena by getting representation in the legislature through the Muslim Chamber of Commerce. No doubt Jinnah was at that time looked to by all the contending groups for support and help. But the significant development was that Jinnah's League found itself associated with the vested interests and aristocratic leadership in Bengal politics because Fazlul Huq's Krishak Praja Party refused to have any truck with it. This symbolized a clash of class interests among Bengal Muslims themselves. Religion till then had not become a sufficiently potent weapon to unite all Muslims under one banner.

The 1937 election results reflected this fluidity of Muslim politics in Bengal in full measure as the League, the Krishak Praja Party and Independent Muslims emerged more or less equally strong. The parity of strength between the two Muslim parties, the League and the Krishak Praja Party, made it necessary for them to co-operate for the sake of Muslim interests. The ambivalence of the Congress, which emerged as the single largest party, did in fact lead to at least a tactical understanding between the Krishak Praja Party and the League. The Krishak Praja Party could not come to terms with the Congress in Bengal due to the initial indecision of the central Congress leadership and the generally intransigent attitudes of the Bengal Congress leaders. In the event, the Congress brought about the formation of a ministry by the League and the Krishak Praja Party. Significantly, the religious sentiments of the Muslim masses were satisfied because the leaders of the two warring camps had joined hands to form the first Muslim ministry in the province. This had the effect of pre-empting the ideological undertones of the Krishak Praja Party, religion becoming more and more the driving force in Muslim politics during this important phase of Bengal's history. Since the Congress refused to accept office and the co-operating Hindus did not belong to any party nor had they any particular following, the complexion of the ministry remained Muslim in the eyes of the Muslim public.

The attitude of the Congress after the ministry was formed



further strengthened this mood of religious fervour among Muslims. Since the Congress opposition's effort was mainly directed at dislodging the ministry, the entire Hindu community and the Hindu press appeared to ordinary Muslims as being opposed to the Muslim ministry. This, in effect, led to a fast deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations in Bengal. Fazlul Huq was ultimately pushed to the extreme point of joining the League within six months of forming the ministry.

The implications of this firm hold gained by the League for the subsequent development of Muslim politics in Bengal were important. It gave sanctity to the Muslim League as a spokesman of Muslims; in one part at least of the country's Muslim majority areas it became, though fortuitously, representative of the Muslim majority and also ruled in that area as such. The fact of the first Muslim ministry caught the imagination of ordinary Muslims and its success or failure, at least in superficial terms, came to be seen as and identified with the progress or downfall of the community as a whole. Therefore, the Congress opposition, though not undemocratic, increased the bitterness in Muslim minds about Hindu intentions. Communal polarisation, for which Jinnah worked at the time of election but which did not materialize, came into its own in the legislative arena. Religion now became the rallying point for the Muslim masses as well as their chosen representatives, ideology receding to the background in the process. Fazlul Huq's association with the League, a party of the Knights and Nawabs, and the several beneficial legislations by the ministry for the poorer sections increased the credibility of the League among Muslims. Lastly, its long association with power and with Fazlul Huq gave the League a base in Bengal, quickly providing Jinnah and the All India League also a base there.

However, the popularity of the League in Bengal, dependent as it was on its remaining in power, was in no way reflected at the base. During the period the League was in power (1937-41), it existed as the pocket organisation of the MLAs in particular places. The anti-ministry activities of the Congress in Bengal made the League pursue a markedly pro-Muslim policy, which to a large extent was justified too because Muslims were more afflicted by poverty. When an important section of the Krishak Praja Party broke away from the ministry and

joined the opposition the Muslim League leaders openly played up communal feelings to strengthen their own base.

The Lahore Resolution (March 1940), i.e., the Pakistan call, did not have any special appeal for Bengali Muslims in the beginning. As it was, being in the ruling party they were already enjoying the fruits of power. Fazlul Huq was made to introduce the Lahore Resolution presumably because of his being the leader of the party in power and also because of the unhesitating support which he had extended to policies of the All India Muslim League during the early phase of his Premiership. During this phase, he seemed to have missed the long-term significance of his backing up Jinnah's call for Pakistan.

Inside Bengal, however, things were perceptibly becoming difficult for Fazlul Huq, who was basically secular in his ideology. As the League leaders in certain parts of the Muslim majority districts in Eastern Bengal initiated the political battle on communal lines, the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha got a fresh lease of life. The activities of the League and the Mahasabha, which increased greatly during this period, led to several communal riots. A dangerous symptom of these politico-communal riots was the desecration of religious places of both communities. This trend worried Fazlul Huq as well as several other leaders of the two communities. Within the League itself Fazlul Huq's relations with other leaders like Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy and Akram Khan were none too happy. The unquestioning commitment of this section to Jinnah's leadership was obnoxious to him. Therefore, even though he introduced the Lahore Resolution, in Bengal Fazlul Huq attempted to foster politics of Hindu-Muslim unity. The joint movement in July 1940 by Muslims and Hindus for the removal of the Holwell monument and observance of a Sirajuddoulah day received his blessings even at the risk of courting displeasure of his European supporters and the Governor. In order to bring the Hindu leaders around a table for discussion, he was prepared to show accommodation on certain Muslim demands, such as the question of the Secondary Education Bill and the Calcutta Municipal Amendment Bill against which Hindus had objections. His paper *Navayug* was brought out with the purpose of setting a healthy trend in politics and to oppose the open manifestation of communalism

by the League leaders in Bengal. Finally, when Jinnah indulged in a show of authority and interfered even in matters which were the sole concern of leaders of the Muslim majority provinces where Muslims were sharing the responsibility of administration and war prosecution, Fazlul Huq revolted against domination of League politics by the minority leadership represented in the person of Jinnah.

These efforts of Fazlul Huq could not, however, overcome the mounting difficulties presented by the war, the Quit-India movement of the Congress and the opposition to Fazlul Huq by government officials, including the Governor, during his second ministry. Finally, Fazlul Huq's dismissal from premiership in March 1943 and installation of the League ministry had the effect of shaking his political base. The League leaders during this period toured different parts of Bengal to turn Muslim public opinion against Fazlul Huq, who, they alleged, had betrayed the Muslim interests, joined hands with the Hindu Mahasabha and in collusion with it had brought about the downfall of the first Muslim ministry in Bengal. There is no doubt that these efforts of the League leaders filled the vacuum created by the League going out of power. It not only kept the League movement alive but also improved the image of its leaders in the eyes of ordinary Muslims. This explains why a popular leader like Fazlul Huq could be isolated from the Muslim masses of Bengal.

In 1943, when the League was again installed in power in Bengal, the Pakistan movement was gathering momentum on the all-India plane. The same year, Jinnah also took a momentous decision. In order to separate control of the parliamentary wing from the party leadership he decided that any member who held power could not hold a position in the party as well. He perhaps did not want a repetition of the mistake he had committed in dealing with Fazlul Huq and also wanted to cut Suhrawardy to size. When Suhrawardy, accordingly, resigned from the party secretaryship he, however, did not allow control of the party to slip out of his hands. Abul Hashim, a progressive radical Muslim Leaguer, became the secretary as Suhrawardy's nominee. Hashem in 1943 was keenly interested in making the party broadbased and representative of Muslims of all shades of opinion and was never quite

identified with the "squabbles for power." To him goes the credit for making the Pakistan movement in Bengal mass-based and democratic contrary to Jinnah's preference for elitist politics. Hashim undertook extensive tours and helped formation of democratic League organizations in different cities and districts. He placed before the League workers the idea that the party was supreme, above the ministry, and that if they did not exercise vigilance, exploitation of the Muslim masses by the vested interests would continue even after the establishment of Pakistan. This way it became easier for the Muslim intelligentsia to interpret the Pakistan ideal in terms of a Muslim majority state in Bengal.

The emergence of the leadership of Abul Hashim at the party level and that of Suhrawardy in parliamentary politics during this period posed a challenge to Nazimuddin's position, and indirectly to Jinnah's too, in Bengal. Since the new Bengal League leadership grew from the people upward, it remained an unknown element for Jinnah until it could demonstrate its credibility during the general election to the central and provincial assemblies. And this is what precisely happened when Bengali Muslims gave a clear verdict in favour of Pakistan by returning 113 Muslim League members (out of total 121 Muslim seats) in the provincial election of 1946 which was fought on the Pakistan issue by Muslims all over India. In Bengal, it meant the victory of the progressive forces inside the League and popular approval of the leadership of Hashim and Suhrawardy, the latter becoming the Prime Minister in 1946. The phenomenon of the League striking roots among the Muslim masses served the purpose of the All India Muslim League in the short run but seeds of future discord lay in the mass base of the League in Bengal, since the all India leadership was basically elitist.

With the end of World War II the British decided to withdraw from India and in order to find a solution to the Indian question they initiated the Simla Conference which was followed by a general election and the Cabinet Mission Plan. The Congress and the League were accepted as authentic representatives of Hindus and Muslims rendering other forces on the political scene secondary. Inside the League this

eliminated the chances of other elements, besides Jinnah, from being effective.

From the very beginning Jinnah had been anxious to give the League an all-India image and project his own leadership which was also accepted by the British Government as is evident from the successive talks the Viceroy had with him from the time the League adopted the Lahore Resolution. Even then in order to nip the provincial aspirations in the bud and to thwart the possibility of the British coming to terms with individual provinces (for which in any case the Congress was also not prepared), he called a legislators' convention at Delhi on 9 April 1946 and made the legislators commit themselves to the idea of one Pakistan state embracing North-Western and Eastern Muslim Zones.

The Muslim leaders in Bengal, despite their newly nurtured mass base, failed to understand clearly the significance of accepting Jinnah's leadership and an all-out commitment to him, particularly on the question of Bengali Muslim interests. They could not make themselves effective in the final mechanics of partition and acquiesced in Jinnah's dictatorial leadership like when he changed the Lahore Resolution in a substantive way by removing 's' from the word 'States' and when he nominated Jogendranath Mandal, a Scheduled Caste leader, to the Interim Government ignoring the Bengal and Assam League leaders. The reasons why Nawab Syed Ali Choudhury, Abdur Rahim and Fazlul Huq had fought against the all-India Muslim leadership were missed by Suhrawardy. As a result, when the majority of Bengal Hindus demanded partition of the province and the British were in a mood to concede it, Jinnah did not come to the rescue of Bengal Muslims. Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy, however, tried to fight the issue on a provincial basis by uniting Hindus and Muslims in an independent sovereign Bengal, but the historical perspective congenial for that unity was now missing, communal passions having been aroused to gain short-term advantages in the game of power. Apart from the dynamics of communal politics, which made the emergence of such a State impossible, the British also were lukewarm to the idea.

On 9 June 1947, the day the Council of the All India Muslim League in New Delhi accepted as a compromise solution the

British Government plan for partition of the Punjab and Bengal, a section of Dacca University students sent a wire to Jinnah warning him that in case he accepted the plan of partition of Bengal, Bengal Muslims would regard him as a "traitor" and continue their struggle for achieving "true Pakistan". But the clock of history could hardly be moved back, not right then as we now know.

As a result, Bengali Muslims, who had for so long fought the minority domination of Bengal's political, social and economic life and had joined the Pakistan movement in the hope of achieving freedom from minority control, found themselves in the same condition even after the achievement of Pakistan. They now smarted under the cultural subjugation, political domination and economic exploitation by the West Pakistan minority, and in the very first year of independence, they started the movement for the protection of their cultural identity, assertion of their political rights as a majority and achievement of economic parity. This struggle was hard, long and costly. It eventually culminated in the demand for an independent Bangladesh, the emergence of which is contemporary history.

# APPENDIX I

## A. Districtwise Population in Bengal during 1901-1941

(Figures in 000s)

District	1901		1911		1921		1931		1941	
	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim
Burdwan	1,221	287	1,221	290	1,122	266	1,239	292	1,394	337
Birbhum	658	202	657	223	568	212	636	253	685	287
Bankura	976	51	990	52	880	47	1,012	51	1,079	56
Midnapore	2,467	185	2,477	194	2,352	181	2,493	212	2,682	247
Hooghly	861	185	884	184	885	174	924	180	1,100	207
Howrah	673	175	742	196	791	202	860	234	1,185	296
24-Parganas	1,310	753	1,526	889	1,688	910	1,742	913	2,310	1,148
Calcutta	551	250	605	242	643	209	822	311	1,532	498
Nadia	676	983	643	963	582	895	574	945	658	1,078
Murshidabad	643	677	643	713	569	676	590	762	685	928
Jessore	702	1,110	668	1,088	656	1,064	634	1,035	721	1,101
Khulna	619	632	667	686	727	723	817	805	878	959
Rajshahi	325	1,135	316	1,148	318	1,140	326	1,083	329	1,173
Dinajpur	726	777	759	824	752	837	794	887	775	967
Jalpaiguri	535	228	547	237	515	232	664	236	552	251
Darjeeling	188	9	190	9	201	9	237	8	168	9
Rangpur	777	1,371	804	1,569	791	1,706	747	1,837	803	2,055

Bogra	154	699	167	810	174	865	173	905	188	1,058
Pabna	357	1,063	354	1,073	334	1,054	332	1,112	384	1,314
Malda	440	425	466	505	401	508	444	572	466	700
Dacca	988	1,650	1,052	1,893	1,069	2,043	1,125	2,293	1,360	2,841
Mymensingh	1,089	2,796	1,162	3,324	1,174	3,624	1,174	3,928	1,297	4,665
Faridpur	734	1,199	775	1,341	816	1,428	847	1,507	1,078	1,871
Backergunj	714	1,565	720	1,694	754	1,851	813	2,105	959	2,567
Tippera	622	1,494	673	1,755	708	2,033	751	2,357	880	2,976
Noakhali	274	866	300	1,001	329	1,142	366	1,339	412	1,804
Chittagong	318	968	347	1,089	364	1,173	392	1,326	458	1,605
Chittagong Hill Tracts	36	5	14	5	32	7	36	7	—	7

Source : *Census of India*, 1901, Bengal, Vol. VI-A, Tables VI, pp. 26-27.

*Census of India*, 1911, Vol. V, Bengal, Part II, Tables, pp. 24-25.

*Census of India*, 1921, Vol. V, Bengal, Part II, Tables, pp. 28-29.

*Census of India*, 1931, Vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, Part II, Tables. p. 160.

*Census of India*, 1941, Bengal, Tables, Vol. IV, Part II, pp. 44-45.



## APPENDIX I (contd.)

## B. Districtwise Number of Literates 1931-1941

(Figures in 000s)

District	1931				1941			
	Total	Hindu	Muslim	Total Literate in English	Hindu	Muslim	Total	Muslim
Burdwan	169	139	27	43	36	4	327	50
Birbhum	66	51	14	11	9	1	140	33
Bankura	95	90	4	14	13	.41	178	6
Midnapore	428	401	23	43	38	2	680	31
Hooghly	157	132	24	42	38	3	320	44
Howrah	200	169	28	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
24 Parganas	298	227	66	63	52	8	694	158
Calcutta	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	1,136	213
Nadia	91	64	25	23	18	5	180	52
Murshidabad	72	50	21	18	14	4	158	53
Jessore	111	73	39	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	222	85
Khulna	138	92	45	30	23	7	284	95
Rajshahi	95	36	58	16	9	7	208	138
Dinaipur	110	43	65	13	8	5	188	110
Jalpaiguri	47	28	17	9	6	2	107	32

Darjeeling	34	24	2	7	3	34	53	27	2
Rangpur	150	64	84	23	13	10	365	126	138
Bogra	102	24	78	17	6	11	198	36	161
Pabna	88	45	40	24	15	9	191	89	102
Malda	33	19	14	6	4	2	85	43	41
Dacca	313	175	135	80	50	29	616	349	262
Mymensingh	332	144	184	79	36	42	656	288	363
Faridpur	182	113	68	41	27	14	377	210	165
Bakarganj	353	201	146	53	37	15	622	271	374
Tippera	239	151	88	44	24	21	597	214	382
Noakhali	184	66	118	26	13	13	535	106	425
Chittagong	156	66	81	31	17	11	342	115	210
Chittagong Hill Tracts	9	3	1	1	1	4	12	2	1

N.A. = Not Available.

Source : Statistical Information of Bengal Districts for 1921-22 to 1930-31, XI 15, *Statistical Abstract of Bengal*, Vol. B. *Census of India* 1951.

## APPENDIX II

### Muslim Jagarani (Muslim Awakening)

Mauter pathe koti Muslim jinda hayche pher  
Ninda glanir jabanika tani kati path baraner  
Juger sapna saphal ajike  
Dipta kanthe suni dike dike  
Jago Muslim chalo nirveeke dhigbijayer sher  
Khuniyar sab lao hatyar sami ar shamsher  
Sanka bihin durgam Jati puno bishwer majhe  
Rudhir sikta maroner pathe  
Banchita chiro bijayer rathe  
Chalite haibe sabe ak sathe Khodar mantra bale  
Dara sabe dara ore vai hara bijoy pataka tole  
Owi shon aji digbijoyer ashiyache paigam  
Nawroj tai karo utsob gulzer abiram

\* \* \* \*  
Amaderi tare rachita biswe sohider tanjam  
Jagiache sobe chutiache owi variab aj sobe  
Khun kheko sab aaj matoara ranalila tandabe

\* \* \* \*  
Ore vai nai kiyamat tak rabo mora jindai  
Moder a Bharate koti shaitan gahe swarther jai  
Pith hote hai jader akhono golamir chap lai  
Paini. Tarai pravur kapale  
Mosir akhore jinda na bole  
Nindabader koto katha chale nirveeke likhe jae  
Shamsher dhare ghuchaite habe tibra a bedonae  
Sat sato bachor a desher mati booker roodhir dia  
Sujala suphala korila je Jati rakhilo sanjibia  
Shikhalo sobbhota vabbota ar  
Rochilo biswe ganer agar  
Jagat juria sishyo jahar nishyo tarai aaj  
Bishwer pathe jhuli kandhe ghore dishyo a chamatkar

\* \* \* \*  
Sat sate jan asi yodi heta  
Bijay garbe tahid gatha

Geye chilo asi amrao setha nai koti achhi beche  
 Shato koti jan sagar haite anibo mukta seche  
 Osi bandooke dike dike puno jalabo gaurab vati  
 Gor hote puno jinda hayechi mora Muslim Jati  
 Aaji nahi mora achetan ghume  
 Jagiachi jug jagaran dhume  
 Atit gaurab Hinder bhume phiria anib pher  
 Jalim rudhire plaban anite kare tai shamsher

\* \* \* \*

Otit abar asibe phiria adhin Bharat bhume  
 Ore chute chal haye ek pran  
 Jinnah-O-Haker shon ai gan  
 Nakib Akram Sahid Hassan  
 Kaome leader sabe  
 Sirajer bhume asiachhe aji jagaran utsab  
 Book thuke dara ore vai hara League patakar tale  
 Haraachhe jaha paba phire puno kara sabe diropan  
 Adhin Bharate garia tulib Mayur Sinhasan.

**Source:** Pamphlet 'Muslim Jagarani' by Farrukh Siar (alias Kazi Lutfar Rahman) read at the Sirajgung Muslim League Conference 1939. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 5s—17 Proceedings B 442-45, July 1939. Transliterated from Bengali by the author.

### APPENDIX III

#### Composition of Bengal Provincial Muslim League during the years 1937-1947

##### A. 1937

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. President             | —A.K. Fazlul Huq   |
| 2. Vice Presidents       | —Nawab Habibullah<br>Bahadur of Dacca, Maulana<br>Mohammad Akram Khan,<br>M.A. Ispahani, Sir Haji<br>Adamji Daud, Maulana<br>Rahul Amin. |
| 3. Secretary             | —Huseyn Shaheed<br>Suhrawardy  |
| 4. Assistant Secretaries | —Abdul Bari, Jahur Ahmed<br>Chowdhury, Farmazul<br>Huq, A. Sabur, Abdul<br>Hakim.  |
| 5. Treasurer             | —M.A.H. Ispahani   |

##### B. 1944

- |              |                                 |
|--------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. President | —Maulana Mohammad<br>Akram Khan |
| 2. Secretary | —Abul Hashim                    |
| 3. Treasurer | —M.A.H. Ispahani                |

#### Members of the Working Committee

1. Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan (President)
2. Abul Hashim (Secretary),
3. H.S. Suhrawardy,
4. Sir Nazimuddin,
5. Fazlul Rahman (Jalpaiguri),
6. Sir Hasan Suhrawardy,
7. Khan Bahadur Abdul Momen,
8. Tamizuddin Khan,
9. Raghbir Ashan,

10. U.S. Usman,
11. M.A.H. Ispahani (the last three were from Calcutta Muslim League)
12. Yusuf Ali Chowdhury,
13. Hamidul Huq Chowdhury,
14. Fazlur Rahman, Dacca,
15. Khwaja Sahabuddin, Dacca,
16. M.S. Ali, Kustia,
17. Azizuddin, Barisal,
18. Ashadullah, Dacca,
19. Nurul Amin,
20. Habibullah Bahar,
21. Maulvi Giasuddin Pathan,
22. Fazlur Kader Chowdhury, Chittagong,
23. Khan Bahadur Musharruff Hossain,
24. Khan Bahadur Syed Muazzamuddin Hossain,
25. Khan Bahadur Maulvi Jalaluddin Ahmed,
26. Khan Bahadur Mohammad Ali,
27. Khan Bahadur A.F.M. Rahman

## APPENDIX IV

### **Fazlul Huq's Letter to Liaquat Ali Khan, Secretary, All India Muslim League, dated 8 September 1941**

Early in July Viceroy asked me through my Governor to serve on National Defence Council as Premier of Bengal representing this Province. I assented feeling this to be my duty. I knew I was selected in official capacity as Premier so no objection could possibly arise. I was surprised to read statement from League President as soon as personnel of Council was announced that he considered action of myself and other League members so objectionable that he must consider what action should be taken to express his disapproval of our conduct. I issued statement explaining position and contending that Premiers were selected in official capacity and therefore could not refuse to serve. I thought position was clear and clamour caused by President's statement would subside; but I was amazed to read President's statement dated 30th July declaring that it had been decided to take disciplinary action. There was no ambiguity in language and words used indicated accomplished fact. I maintain this action of President was highly unconstitutional. Despite Madras resolution he should never have done anything without hearing our explanation. I also maintain that his subsequent decision to refer matter to Working Committee was meaningless. Working Committee had no alternative but to endorse President's action as refusal would have amounted to vote of no-confidence in President, contingency that Working Committee were not prepared to face. Committee therefore passed resolution calling upon me to resign unconditionally from National Defence Council.

2. President apparently received communication from Viceroy through Bombay Governor on 21st July intimating Premiers had been approached to serve on Defence Council in certain capacity. Whether we were selected as Premiers or as representative men, President knew of our selection at least one day before names were published. It was his clear duty to inform us by telegram or by telephone of his disapproval and

that he would like us to resign from Defence Council; he might even have hinted that if we did not resign he would be obliged to take disciplinary action against us. But instead he waited till names were published and then announced decision to take disciplinary action, even ordinary courtesy required a warning before such announcement. His procedure placed us in extremely awkward position, he gave us no opportunity of explanation and took us unawares as if anxious to make public exhibition of his authority; he thus converted simple affair into complicated political problem.

3. I maintain that acceptance of membership of Defence Council in no way involves breach of League's principle or policy. League last year rejected Viceroy's offer to form expanded War Council composed of Indian states and representatives of various political parties but Defence Council consists of Indian states and representatives of various Provinces. This makes fundamental difference and membership of Defence Council therefore does not come within mischief of League resolution. Despite President's declaration that we were selected as Muslim representatives I maintain that we were selected as Premiers. From this point of view also membership of Defence Council does not involve violation of League principles and policy. Further since outbreak of war, I have been taking keenest interest in promoting war efforts and using official and non-official position to induce people of Bengal to cooperate in support thereof. Hitherto President has not expressed disapproval of my extensive activities in aid of war efforts but has even allowed prominent Muslim League leaders to act likewise throughout India.

4. Having regard to my provincial war activities my membership of Defence Council pales into insignificance; I consider it absurd that I should be called upon to non-cooperate with Government of India at centre. On merits I maintain President's action ratified by Working Committee was unjustified. I do not admit that my acceptance of membership of Council has disapproval of majority of Muslim community of India or of Bengal Muslims. Outside Province there is large volume of public opinion in my favour. President's action throughout has been unfair and unconstitutional and I have done nothing contrary to interests of Muslim community;



charge that by accepting membership of Council I have created a situation which may lead to split in ranks of Muslim India is baseless. I therefore find no justification for resiling from my original decision to stick to membership of Council despite view of President and Working Committee.

5. But there are other matters to be taken into consideration. President's indiscreet and hasty announcement creating feeling in Muslim minds that we have accepted membership of Council from personal interests or to oblige high officials has produced most baneful consequences. Very few of present generation of Muslim politicians know services I have rendered to League or Muslim Community; without wishing to be boastful I have no cause to be ashamed of my record as a leader in cause of Islam and Indian Muslims. I emphatically declare that I am not being hampered in any way by high officials from exercising my independent judgement. I have been faced by embarrassing dilemma. I feel I ought to adhere to Council, but I also feel that continuance therein especially after other Premiers have vacated their seats would lead to split in ranks of Indian Muslims. In such event I would be held responsible for situation and responsibility may also be thrown on other personage who have not had slightest desire to interfere in these matters but whose detachment is not within knowledge of public.

6. In these circumstances I feel that no useful purpose would be served by my being member of National Defence Council; I am therefore going to request Viceroy through Governor to give me leave to tender resignation. In taking this step I have had before me sole desire to avoid conflict in ranks not merely of Muslim League but also of Indian Muslim community. My reason for resignation thus differs from Sir Sikander's. He alleged to have resigned because he felt convinced he had acted under misconception of facts. I resign because though convinced I was right in accepting membership of Council, my continuance therein would jeopardise interests of community. Sir Sikander feels he was wrong and has rectified mistake; I feel I was right but cannot continue member in view of possible consequences. I am thus deliberately accepting position which militates against my own judgement, in desire to avoid greater evil of domestic feud at time when we should close our ranks for great task ahead of defending best interests

of community and country.

7. I protest emphatically against manner in which Bengal and Punjab Muslim interests are being imperilled by Muslim leaders of 'Minority Provinces'. Muslim brethren in minority provinces can never hope to enjoy effective voice in administration let alone power. They cannot imagine advantages of dominant position of Muslim community in administration of Bengal and Punjab. They neither realise responsibilities of Muslim Premiers of these Provinces nor care for repercussions on politics of Bengal and Punjab Muslims of their decisions for Muslim India as a whole. They should not meddle too much with politics of majority provinces. At present I feel that Bengal does not count much in counsels of political leaders outside province, though we constitute more than one third of total Muslim population of India. My critics prejudge and condemn me without knowing facts and forgot my life long services to Muslim community. I confidently hope that political dictators in future will act with greater foresight so as to prevent creation of situation from which escape can be effected only by course of action which is revolting to sound sense or even conscience.

8. It follows that I cannot continue to be member of Working Committee of All India Muslim League. As mark of protest against arbitrary use of powers vested in President I resign from membership of Working Committee and Council of All India Muslim League. I cannot usefully continue to be member of body which shows scant courtesy to provincial leaders and arrogates to itself functions which ought to be exercised by provincial executive. In matters under discussion President should have referred question to decision of Provincial Muslim League. He has signally failed to discharge heavy responsibility of office in constitutional and reasonable manner. In tendering resignation I should like to enter caveat that recent events have forcibly brought home to me that principles of democracy and autonomy in All India Muslim League are being subordinated to arbitrary wishes of single individual who seeks to rule as omnipotent authority even over destiny of 33 millions in Bengal who occupy key position in Indian Muslim politics.

## APPENDIX V

### **Extracts from Nazimuddin's Letter to M.A. Jinnah dated 14 December 1941**

I have been so busy during the last fortnight that I have not been able to write to you and give you detailed information. I hope Hassan kept you posted with all the news. I am glad to find that you have nominated Hassan on the Working Committee. I would like to have had Saheed there, specially as he feels that he has a prior claim to anyone of us. But, under the present circumstances, your decision is a very wise one. We are hopelessly short of funds and our future success depends on our ability to organize which cannot be done without money. Both the Ispahani brothers are very keen and genuine Leaguers and our main and perhaps the only hope. Mirza Ahmed Ispahani has undertaken to find about twenty-five to thirty thousand rupees for organizing the Muslim League in Bengal. He expects to raise this sum from the mercantile community in Calcutta, but I am afraid in the end he may have to meet practically the whole of it.

Now let me tell you of what happened here—upto a point everything went according to my plan; that is to say H.E. and the European group were supporting us and when it was announced that Messrs Sarat Bose, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and others had accepted Mr. Fazlul Huq as leader, H.E. decided that break was inevitable and we were given to understand that we would be called.

The only difficulty was that H.E. had so committed himself that he was not prepared to prorogue the Assembly and the Speaker was also not prepared to adjourn the House, sine die. The latter's attitude was inexplicable and as a Muslim Leaguer he disappointed us very much. The break with Mr. Fazlul Huq took place with practically the tacit approval of H.E. and we were given to understand that when the Coalition Party elected the new leader I would be sent for. We then decided to form Muslim League Legislature Party. We had about 55 to 60 signatures and at the meeting of the Coalition

Party which was held on the same day 72 members were present and they unanimously passed a vote of no-confidence on Mr. Fazlul Huq. But suddenly H.E.'s attitude changed and we later came to learn that the non-official Europeans also adopted what may be called a hostile attitude towards us and it is my personal opinion that the attitude of the non-official Europeans influenced H.E. also. I had long and heated discussions with H.E. and once after a protracted argument when H.E. could not find any reply to my claim to be sent for, he promised to do so on the next day, provided I was prepared to face the legislature in seven days' time. He asked to consult my friends and come back the next day. I was definitely given to understand that if I agreed to meet a vote of no-confidence immediately, he would give me the first chance. Next morning I went back with the information that I had received very good response and there was every chance of my forming a stable Ministry and I was prepared to face the legislature according to H.E.'s wishes. H.E. told me that the war news was very bad; that the Japanese had the command of the sea and were able to land troops in Malaya and therefore he wanted to have a War Cabinet; that Mr. Fazlul Huq and I should agree to work together. He insisted on our meeting together. We met and I reported to you over telephone the gist of the conversation we had. He had been toying with the idea of a war cabinet and although I pointed out to him that it was neither a practicable nor a feasible proposition yet throughout the day he tried his best to have a war cabinet. Mr. Fazlul Huq under the guidance of Mr. Sarat Bose and Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee refused to work under Azizul Haque and H.E. therefore had to drop the idea. After that he definitely made up his mind to send for Mr. Fazlul Huq. The main consideration which led H.E. to this decision was the fact that if he asked me to form the Ministry his position with the Hindus would be bad. I told him that the Muslims were receiving the same treatment which they got at the time of cancelling the Partition of Bengal, which H.E. himself had denounced. I also told him many home truths and pointed out that he was handing over the Government to the 5th Columnists and to persons whom he knew definitely to be anti-British and in

favour of Hitler and Japan. But nothing would shake him from the fear of what the Hindu Press would say and thus, once again, the Mussalmans of Bengal have been let down by the Governor and the non-official Europeans.

The arrest of Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose came as a big surprise to everyone, excepting myself, but neither it has improved our position nor has it any way affected the influence of the subversive elements on the Government of Bengal. ...

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\*

P.S. Shaheed is very disappointed and dejected particularly as people are sympathising with him for not being nominated to the W.C. He thinks that in view of his stand for the League and attacks on him his position in Bengal will be jeopardised. The Muslims of Bengal will not understand why Ispahani has been preferred to him.

## APPENDIX VI

### **Extracts from Fazlul Huq's Letter to the Governor, John Herbert, dated 2 August 1942**

At a time when the implications of the Congress Resolution have filled all our hearts with the deepest anxiety for the future of India, I feel unfortunately compelled to write this letter to Your Excellency. I wish I could avoid this correspondence. But circumstances have left me no other alternative, and it pains me much to have to say very bluntly that you have contributed not a little to the creation of the situation which has forced me to take this unpleasant step. You are the Governor of the Province and I am your Chief Minister and your principal adviser. Our mutual relations impose on both of us reciprocal duties and obligations, and I can never shirk the responsibility of intervening by means of friendly, but frank, advice whenever I find you are treading the wrong path. If I allow things to drift, I will be failing in my duty to you and to the people of this Province. I am convinced that the time has come when I must speak to you quite openly what I feel in order to avoid a constitutional crisis in Bengal. More than once have I sounded a note of caution and have told you that you have been following a policy which cannot but have the inevitable effect of practically suspending the constitution in Bengal, . . . As the head of the Cabinet I cannot possibly allow this attitude on your part to go unchallenged . . . . I am writing with the stern resolve to assert myself as the Chief Minister, and I can assure you that if it leads to a constitutional struggle between you as the Governor and me as the Chief Minister, I will not shirk from doing my duty regardless of consequences.

Broadly speaking, there are two classes of cases . . . . In the first category I will put that class of cases wherein I have detected your personal interference in almost every matter of administrative detail, including even those where your interference is definitely excluded by the Government of India Act. A little reflection will convince you how unwelcome must be such an interference, and how bitterly Ministers must resent

impediments in the way of the exercise of the very limited powers which they possess under the Act. As it is, the Act is bad enough and is no better than a clever subterfuge by which the permanent officials have got all the powers but no responsibility, whereas the Ministers have all the responsibility and no powers. But the camouflage with which the Act abounds is so transparent that it is not difficult to detect that, beneath the pretentious device of Ministers functioning in a system of Provincial Autonomy, the real power is still vested in the permanent officials; the Ministers have been given a mockery of authority, and the steel frame of the Imperial Services still remains intact, dominating the entire administration, and casting sombre shadows over the activities of Ministers . . . . In the second category I would put those classes of cases in which you have, directly or indirectly, encouraged sections of permanent officials to flout the authority of Ministers, leading them to ignore Ministers altogether, and to deal directly with you as if the Ministers did not exist . . . .

Let me now come to facts. As regards your personal interference in total disregard of Ministerial responsibilities, I will briefly refer to only a few. There is first of all the case of your mandate to the Joint Secretary, Commerce and Labour Department, in April last in the matter of the rice removal policy. Here you acted as if the Government of India Act in Bengal had been suspended, and you were at the head of an administration under Section 93 of the Act. In a matter of such vital importance, affecting the question of the food-stuffs of the people, you should have called an emergent meeting of the Cabinet and discussed with your Ministers the best means of carrying out the wishes of the military authorities and of the Central Government. But you did nothing of the kind. You did not even send for the Minister in charge of the Department, although he was readily available, but you sent for the Joint Secretary instead. You gave him orders to take up the work of removal at once, without caring to find out the exact position regarding the excess of rice and paddy in different areas and the best means of removal and the cheapest method of carrying out the scheme. The Joint Secretary says that when he was arranging to carry out your orders, you grew impatient and gave him definite directions to arrange for the

removal of excess rice from three districts within 24 hours. Even then you did not consult your Ministers, because presumably you thought you could not trust them. The result has been a dismal failure so far as this particular policy is concerned. The Joint Secretary in his haste and hurry to oblige you, advanced twenty lakhs of rupees to a nominee of a friend to begin the work, without any terms having been settled, or without any arrangements having been made for the safety of public money, . . . . At the present moment we are faced with a rice famine in Bengal mainly in consequence of an uncalled for interference on your part, and of hasty action on the part of the Joint Secretary. . . .

Then I come to the boat removal policy. In this you have all along been acting under the advice and guidance of some permanent officials without taking your Ministers into confidence. You have even ignored one who happens to be not merely your Chief Minister but also the Minister in charge of the Home Department. You seem to have been consulting the Military authorities in secret and discussing plans with the permanent officials; . . . . The most outstanding instance of blunder which has been committed by the permanent officials, apparently with your knowledge and concurrence, has been the case of the prevention of boats from going out into the Bay of Bengal for the purpose of cultivation of lands in the various islands lying at the mouth of the Delta. . . . It is enough for me to emphasize that the whole scheme was planned in consultation with the Military authorities and some permanent officials, without the knowledge not merely of the Cabinet but even of the Home Minister.

I will now say a few words about the manner in which you have all along resisted my efforts for the expansion of the Cabinet and the appointment of Parliamentary Secretaries. Whatever may be your powers under the Act, it is evident that as the Chief Minister I should have the final say in the matter of the composition of the Cabinet and in parliamentary appointments. . . . But your attitude has been one of definite disregard of my wishes in these respects. You seem to have taken up this attitude, perhaps in the forlorn hope of getting Sir Nazimuddin and his group into the Cabinet. . . .

During the last few days I have discovered that orders have



been passed by Secretaries either on their own responsibility or with your approval, explicit or implicit, by totally ignoring the Ministers. For instance, orders have been passed that the Government of India should be requested to send back to Bengal all officers lent to them by the Bengal Government; orders have been passed that the powers exercisable by the Provincial Government under section 76(B) of the Defence of India Act and Rules be delegated to local officers. I was not consulted in these cases although they affect vital matters of policy. . . .

I now come to the class of cases in which permanent officials have acted in defiance of Ministers by completely ignoring their authority. Let me begin with the case of the outrages alleged to have been committed on women at Sanoa in the district of Noakhali. There was a Deputy Collector at Feni who happened to be the Additional Subdivisional Officer at the time, who had sent a telegram to the District Magistrate apprising him of what had occurred and asking for instructions how to proceed. This action on the part of the Deputy Collector was resented by some of the officials, presumably because they thought that the telegram might be a very important piece of evidence against the guilty persons. This officer who had only tried to do his duty, was transferred from Feni, by a telegram, at the bidding of the local officials, by the Chief Secretary. And the Chief Secretary passed orders without consulting me who happened to be the Chief Minister and the Home Minister! I came to know of this transfer several days after it had taken place when I went to Feni to find out what the facts of the alleged outrage actually were. . . .

May I in this connection remind you that when you came to know of my programme to visit Feni, you advised me not to go because you thought that my visit would embarrass the local officials? I explained to you that I had no intention of embarrassing anybody, but I considered it my duty to pay a visit to an area where the people seemed to be so much distressed. When I went there I found that practically all the officials of the Chittagong Division had gathered at Feni with a view to prevent my visit to the place of occurrence. The Commissioner of the Division plainly told me that he had received a telephonic message from your Secretary asking him

to persuade me to abandon my visit. I did not go to the village because I did not want to quarrel with the officials but met relations of most of the women said to have been outraged and the relations of their deceased husbands. I had also certain documents brought up to me which left no doubt in my mind as to what happened. The reasons for the telegraphic transfer of the Deputy Collector, and for the anxiety shown by you and the local officials to prevent my visit to the locality are abundantly clear. . . .

You should act as the constitutional Governor and not as the mouthpiece of permanent officials, or of any political party. In other words, you should allow Provincial Autonomy to function honestly rather than as a cloak for the exercise of autocratic powers as if the Province was being governed under section 93 of the Act.

## APPENDIX VII

### Manifesto: 'Let Us Go to War'

Quaid-e-Azam Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah on behalf of the All India Muslim League declares that the ensuing General Election of the Central and Provincial Legislatures of India will be taken as a plebiscite of the Muslims of India on Pakistan and the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League in its meeting on the 1st August, 1945 adopted a resolution to this effect. Major Attlee's Labour Government on behalf of the British Imperialism has accepted this challenge.

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In these days the ballot box is the only medium through which the public opinion can be ascertained with the greatest possible accuracy. The Muslim League, therefore, as the organisation of the plain blunt Muslims who are not addicted to clever machinations have straightway demanded general election in India and have declared that they would take this election as a plebiscite on Pakistan and a plebiscite on their claim to represent the whole of Muslim India. His Majesty's Government have decided to hold election in the next winter. We are, therefore, in the midst of a war as the General Election is going to be the first pitched battle for Pakistan with the enemies of Muslim India.

The Bengal Provincial Muslim League is making necessary preliminary preparations for fighting this battle. We have to marshal and mobilise our resources for winning this war. The Bengal Provincial Muslim League represents thirtyfive millions of Muslims of Bengal and it has now on record over ten lacs of members. In such a democratic organisation as this it is quite natural that there will be difference of opinion among its leaders, workers, members and supporters. I appeal to all in all sincerity and earnestness to bundle up all their differences and to preserve them if necessary in cold storage during the pendency of our common struggle. Our internecine conflict either for power, personal likes or dislikes or for anything for the matter of that at this juncture would be suicidal. The

result of the coming General Election shall have far reaching consequences and for sometime the destiny of India shall be determined by it.

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In this war of ours in spite of all of our differences legitimate or otherwise, ideological or personal, we must unite. As a first step, in order to avoid all possible chances and apprehensions of disruption in our own army the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League in its meeting of the 27th August, 1945 passed a resolution suspending all elections for reconstituting the Union, the sub-Division, the District and the Provincial Leagues till the declaration of the result of the elections of the Central and Provincial Legislatures. I am summoning the Council of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League among other things to elect members of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League Parliamentary Board. It does not require much wisdom to understand that our winning this General Election would much depend upon the composition of the Parliamentary Board. I, therefore, warn the gentlemen of the Council of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League from now not to allow personal interest to overpower their sense of patriotism.

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Pakistan means complete independence. They are the fools, dreamers, visionaries or the hypocrites who think that Pakistan can be achieved without the greatest imaginable struggle and sacrifice. It must be known clearly to every soldier of Pakistan that the way to Pakistan is harder than the way to Calvary.

Our poets and literators, artists and artisans, youths and students, landlords and peasants, ulema and laymen must answer to the clarion call of the great Leader of Muslim India, sink all their differences, forget the past, and pull all their resources for the winter struggle, the General Election of the Legislatures. . . .

The Pakistan formula is very simple and corresponds with the realities of Indian Politics. The basis of Pakistan is real democracy, freedom, equity and justice and is opposed to imperial domination and economic exploitation which is the basis of the favourite, 'Akhand Bharat' of the Congress.

Free India was never one country. Free Indians were never

one nation. In the past India was 'Akhand' under the domination of the Mouriya and the Mughals and is now 'Akhand' under the domination of Great Britain. Liberated India must necessarily be, as God has made it, a sub-continent having complete independence for every nation inhabiting it. However much weakness the Congress may have for the capitalists of Bombay and however much they may desire by way of doing a good turn to them to open opportunities for exploiting the whole of India under the cover of 'Akhand Bharat,' Muslim India to a man will resist all attempts of the Congress to establish dictatorship in India of any coterie, group or organisation. Pakistan means freedom for all, Muslims and Hindus alike. . . .

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While appealing to the Muslims to join the army of the League and to fight its defensive war against the Congress I would warn them not to forget the now quiet and apparently indifferent imperialist of Delhi and London. We must not forget that the achievement of Pakistan lies in the ultimate liquidation of the British Imperialism. . . . We shall win Pakistan by the toils and sacrifices of our own people and not through the courtesy and benevolence of the British. Since we have taken our stand upon the solid rock of equity, justice and fairplay, since freedom and liberty and not domination and exploitation is the incentive of our struggle, by the grace of God we are going to win, if we are united. So unity, fraternity and liberty shall be the battle-cry for our first war for Pakistan.

The head and the heart of the people as I have seen during my tour in Bengal are perfectly sound and they will not make any mistake unless the Leaders at the top in their anxiety to secure their leadership create confusion in their minds. We, therefore, must guard ourselves against this only possible source of disruption. We must never forget for a moment that Pakistan is our end and a ministry under the Government of India Act of 1935 will be merely incidental. Whoever amongst the leaders will exhibit any tendency to secure his position from now in the future assembly either as a minister or a prime minister shall be marked well and Muslim Bengal shall never forgive him.

The General Election is the beginning of our struggle. Immediately after recording our votes in favour of Pakistan at

the polling centres, immediately after winning our plebiscite liquidating the false claims of the Congress to represent the Muslims we shall direct our attention towards British Imperialism and demand immediate transference of power to the peoples of India on the basis of Pakistan. Our battle is a battle for freedom for all and we hope and trust that every genuine freedom loving man and woman shall be with us.

We are going to fight the Congress but we don't feel quite happy about it as we never liked to consume any part of our energy in fighting the Congress, the Mahasabha or in fact any Indian people or organisation, our battle is hundred percent defensive. We did not like to fight the Congress, they unjustly and unfairly like the Fascist aggressors have forced war on us. Therefore, without malice, without vengeance, with complete faith in our ultimate victory, with heart within and God over head 'LET US GO TO WAR.'

(Statement issued to the Press on the 6th September 1945).

## APPENDIX VIII

### Figures of Abduction, Forced Conversion, etc. of the Tippera and Noakhali Disturbances

		<i>Tippera</i>		<i>Noakhali</i>	
		5	1	2 (female reported)	—
1.	Figures of abduction				
	(a) abducted :				about 1000
	(b) forcibly married :				182
2.	Forced Conversion :	about 9895			1000
				Begumgunj	"
				Lakshimpur	"
				Raipur	1000
				Ramgunj	1200
				Sandwip	"
					85
				Total :	3467
				(correct figures under this head cannot be given)	
3.	Figures of rape committed by				
	(a) Rioters	11		7	
	(b) Police	—		—	
	(c) Military	—		10 (two finally reported false)	
4.	Figures of death				
	(a) Hindus	39		178	
	(b) Muslims	26		42 (by Police and Military)	
	(c) Unclassified	—		—	
5.	Figures of injured				
	(a) Hindus	42		58	
	(b) Muslims	16		26 (by Police and Military)	
	(c) Unclassified	—		—	

Source : Letter from E.H. LeBrocq, D.I.G. Police, Bakarganj, Range No. 110 CC dated 4.3.47, Government of Bengal Confidential File 49/47 on History of Noakhali Tippera Disturbance of 1946. Also Confidential File 47/47.

## APPENDIX IX

### A. Extracts from the press statement of H.S. Suhrawardy, Chief Minister, in New Delhi, 27 April 1947

It must be a matter of greatest regret to all those who were eagerly looking forward to the welfare and prosperity of Bengal to find that an agitation for its partition is being vigorously pursued in some quarters. This cry would never have been raised had it not been due to a sense of frustration and impatience on the part of some Hindus in as much as the members of their community have not an adequate share in the Bengal Ministry inspite of their numbers in the province, their wealth, influence, education, participation in the administration of the province, their propaganda and their inherent strength.

This frustration is largely the result of a failure to realise that the present conditions in Bengal are not applicable to an independent sovereign state as I hope Bengal will be. Today we are in the midst of a struggle in India between contending factions of all-India importance each intent on enforcing its views on the other and neither willing to give way except at a price which the other is not prepared to pay.

Their disputes profoundly affect the politics of all the provinces and the problems are being treated as a whole. An entirely different state of circumstances will arise when each province will have to look after itself and when each province is sure to get practical, if not total, independence, and the people of Bengal will have to rely upon each other.

It is unbelievable that under such a set of circumstances there can exist a Ministry in Bengal which will not be composed of all the important elements of its society or which can be a communal party Ministry or where the various sections will not be better represented than they are now. I do not think that the fact that the Muslims will have a slight preponderance in the Ministry by virtue of their slender majority will be grudged by the Hindus as indeed this has hitherto been accepted by all as inherent in the nature of things in Bengal.



I have read the most fervid fulminations against the government of Bengal on its alleged treatment of the Hindu population. These denunciations have been built on the most slender and imaginary foundations. I by no means admit that the demand for the partition of Bengal is the demand of the majority of the Hindus even of West Bengal, let alone of the majority of the Hindus of Bengal.

The ties and culture of the Hindus of every part of Bengal are so much the same that it is not even to the advantage of the Hindus of one part of Bengal to sever those ties in the hope of grasping power.

Indeed by the same analogy the wishes of all the people of Bengal—Muslims, Hindus and Scheduled Castes and others ought to be ascertained on the question of partition of Bengal which can only be undertaken if there is a substantial majority in its favour. It is these fundamental factors peculiar to Bengal which differentiate the question of partition of Bengal from the Muslim demand for the division of India, apart from such factors as economic integrity, mutual reliance and the necessity of creating a strong workable state.

The lead of partition has been taken by the Hindu Mahasabha which hopes that by whipping up agitation for the partition of Bengal, for the dismissal of the Bengal Ministry, imposition of Sec. 93, establishment of regional Ministries, by arousing fanaticism against the Muslims of Bengal, by creating disturbances through hartals and violence, they will be able to ingratiate themselves with the Hindu people and destroy the influence of the Congress. The Hindu Mahasabha wishes to stage a comeback, so do sundry politicians who have not been able to find an inch for themselves.

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But let us once more consider the validity of the demand itself. Why should the Bengalee Hindus demand a separate home-land?

Let me proceed on the assumption for the time being that the demand is not limited to a few but is put forward by all caste Hindus, Scheduled Castes and those who have not returned their castes. Nor has their culture, their religion, their language suffered under the present regime and how do they think that in a future set-up they will suffer so that they

can only flourish and safeguard their culture and life if they have a small portion of Western Bengal. To my mind, I think, the demand is suicidal from the point of view of the Hindus. Even if it did happen, an eventuality which I cannot conceive, that the rule passed solely into the hands of Muslims, and attitude which would combine the entire population of Hindus in opposition to Muslims, could such a policy possibly succeed or be put into effect, where any Government of Bengal would have to carry its own servants along with it and most of them belong to the Hindu community? Then again, the industry, business, the professions are in their hands. Their youths are well-advanced and know their rights and know how to achieve their claims. Not only is the present attitude due to a sense of impatience, frustration, not only is it short-sighted but is a confession of a defeatism which one hardly expected from the great Hindu Community of Bengal.

Noakhali is constantly cited as an indication of what might happen in the future set-up of an independent state. I have already said that it would be ridiculous to draw conclusions for the future from the present set-up but let us pause here for a moment. Can Noakhali and the incident of that area be considered typical and an augury for the future, and are there not many other districts where the Muslims are in a convincing and overwhelming majority and yet has not peace been preserved in those districts and has not the Hindus carried on exactly as before with all their powers and privileges?

And let us pause for a moment to consider what Bengal can be if it remains united. It will be a great country, indeed the richest and the most prosperous in India capable of giving to its people a high standard of living, where a great people will be able to rise to the fullest height of their stature, a land that will truly be plentiful. It will be rich in agriculture, rich in industry and commerce and in course of time it will be one of the most powerful and progressive states of the world. If Bengal remains united this will be no dream, no fantasy. Anyone who can see what her resources are and the present state of its development will agree that this must come to pass if we ourselves do not commit suicide.

I have visualised all along, therefore, Bengal as an

independent state and not part of any union of India. Once such states are formed, their future rests with them. I shall never forget how long it took for the Government of India to realise the famine conditions in Bengal in the year 1943, how in Bengal's dire need it was denied foodgrains by the neighbouring province of Bihar, how since then every single province of India has closed its doors, and deprived Bengal of its normal necessities, how in the councils of India Bengal is relegated to an undignified corner while other provinces wield undue influence.

No, if Bengal is to be great, it can only be so if it stands on its own legs and all combine to make it great. It must be master of its own resources and riches and its own destiny. It must cease to be exploited by others and shall not continue to suffer any longer for the benefit of the rest of India. . . . To those, therefore, of the Hindus who talk so lightly of the partition of Bengal, I make an appeal to drop this movement so fraught with unending mischief. Surely, some method of government can be evolved by all of us sitting together which will satisfy all sections of the people and revivify the splendour and glory that was Bengal's.

(Source : *Morning News*, 28 April 1947; *The Hindu*, 29 April 1947).

#### **B. The Press Statement of Abul Hashim, Secretary, Bengal Provincial Muslim League, Calcutta, 29 April 1947**

Time has come when truth must be told. Surrendering to vulgar thinking for cheap popularity and opportunist leadership is intellectual prostitution. Only around 1905 Bengal was the thought-leader of India and successfully challenged the might of the then British Government. It is a pity that Bengal today is intellectually bankrupt and is begging and borrowing thought and guidance from alien heroes. I wonder what has happened to the Hindus of Bengal who produced men like Surendranath Banerjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Ashutosh Mukherjee, Chittaranjan Das and Subhash Chandra Bose.

The present revolutionary thinking of India owes its birth to Bengal. True revolution does not lie in internecine killing but in creating revolution in thinking and feeling. Bengal must shake off her inferiority complex and defeatist mentality, revert

to her past traditions, rise again to the heights of her genuine and mould her destiny. Sentiments and emotions have no place in serious thinking. Temporary insanity should not be allowed to influence our future decisions.

Bengal today is standing at the cross roads—one leading to freedom and glory and the other to eternal bondage and abounding disgrace. Bengal must make a decision here and now. There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the floods leads on to fortune. Opportunity once lost may come no more.

Cent percent alien capital, both Indian and Anglo-American, exploiting Bengal is invested in West Bengal. The growing socialist tendencies amongst us have created fears of expropriation in the minds of our alien exploiters. They have the prudence to visualise difficulties in a free and united Bengal. It is in the interest of the alien capital that Bengal should be divided, crippled and incapacitated so that neither part thereof may have strength enough to resist it in future.

From the nature of the communal disturbances in Bengal I am of the opinion that these are being engineered and encouraged by Anglo-Indian vested interests and their Indian allies. In the ordinary course of business respectable and reliable parties find it difficult to secure licence for fire arms. But immense quantities of dangerous weapons of British and American origin, left over in India, are being lavishly distributed among the Hindu and Muslim hooligans, conscious and unconscious agents of the partition of Bengal! A big gun of Bengal, who has developed an obnoxious craze for the Premiership of Bengal, once remarked to me that since he has no future and his everything was past, he has thus justified his opportunism. Fossils of Bengal may find immediate gain in her partition but what has happened to her youth, whose entire destiny lies in the future? Are they going to barter away their future for the benefit of handful of careerists placed at a position of vantage by circumstances?

Partition of Bengal bears no analogy to the partition of India. The lamentable perversion in thinking which suggests that the movement for the partition of Bengal is convenient counterblast to Pakistan arises out of a colossal ignorance of the contents and implications of the Lahore Resolution to which and which alone and not this or that interpretation

thereof, Muslims of India owe allegiance. That resolution never contemplated the creation of any 'Akhand' Muslim State or any artificial Muslim majority either by forcible importation of alien elements as is being done in Palestine or by any mass transference of population as was done between Turkey and Greece.

It rarely demanded complete sovereignty for those countries which are known to the world as Muslim majority countries, and by implication demands complete sovereignty and self-determination of all the nations and countries of India. It gives Bengal and other cultural units of India complete sovereignty while keeping open the possibility of creating an international (*sic*) purely on a voluntary basis for the benefit of all.

Pakistan never postulates that in Bengal or the Punjab Muslims shall be the ruling race and others reduced to the status of a subject nation. Quaid-e-Azam after the failure of Jinnah-Gandhi talks at Bombay had declared in clear and unequivocal terms that free Pakistan states shall be governed and administered by the will and consent of the entire people on the basis of universal adult suffrage. I will like to add by system of joint electorate if the minorities do not demand separate electorate for their own protection.

In the absence of outstanding leadership the country is being rack rented by vulgar fortune-hunters. Youths of Bengal, both Hindu and Muslim, must unite, liberate their country from the shackles of extraneous influence and make a bid for regaining Bengal's lost prestige and an honourable place in the future comity of nations, both of India and the world. Let the youths of Bengal build their character from their past traditions and derive inspirations for their present struggle from the glories of the future.

Hindus and Muslims of Bengal, preserving their respective entities, had by their joint efforts, in perfect harmony with the nature and climatic influence of their soil, developed a wonderful common culture and tradition which compare favourably with the contribution of any nation of the world in the evolution of man.

In the free state of Bengal, Hindus and Muslims as such shall have no right exclusively reserved for them except the right of Muslims to govern their society according to their

own "Shariat" and the right of the Hindus to govern their own society according to their "Sastras". These rights give the Muslims their spiritual need for Pakistan and the Hindus a real homeland for the free development of their own ideology and material realisation of their particular outlook on life. It is unthinkable that in free Bengal, the Hindus of Bengal who constitute nearly half of its population will be denied their legitimate share in administration and in the enjoyment of her material resources. Hindu-Muslim population of Bengal is almost balanced. Neither community is in a position to dominate the other. If Bengal is permitted to harness all her resources for the exclusive service of the children of her soil, both Hindus and Muslims shall be happy and prosperous for many a century to come.

But in a divided Bengal West Bengal is bound to be treated as far-flung province, possibly colony, of alien Indian imperialism. However high they may pitch their expectation on partition, it is crystal clear to me that the Hindus of Bengal shall be reduced to the status of daily wage-earner of an alien capitalism.

It will be a tragic mistake to visualise the future in the context of the vicious present bondage and slavery. Hindus of Bengal have developed a suspicious complex from 10 years of one party Muslim ministry in Bengal. But it must be told to all fairness that neither the Bengal nor the All India Muslim League ever stood in the way of coalition with the real representatives of the Hindus of Bengal. The Muslim League party in the Legislature made persistent efforts to effect such a coalition but failed in the attempt due to the interference of the Congress High Command. Mr. Suhrawardy before the formation of his ministry made honest efforts to secure the co-operation of the Congress.

I distinctly remember that Mr. Gandhi in course of his talks with us at 40 Theater Road, on the eve of his departure for Noakhali, had said "I am not enamoured of coalition. I believe in one party government. Therefore, I do not insist on coalition in Bengal." I might mention here that Bengal was then the only place which had a Muslim ministry. Any coalition here would have envisaged coalition ministries in the rest of India. Thus Hindu Bengal was left in the lurch as were

Muslim League elsewhere.

Hindus and Muslims of Bengal left to themselves and freed from the menace of Indianism can settle their affairs peacefully and happily. Unfortunately, the paramount interests of Muslim parliamentarians have always been in shuffling the ministry like a pack of cards. They could hardly concentrate on any policy and programme good, bad or indifferent.

I am unfortunate in as much as I fail to appreciate what is there in the wretched ministry under the Act of 1935. Since, reasonably or otherwise there is a suspicion on the part of the Hindus against them, it is now upto Muslims to clear the deck and convince them, not merely by sermons and press statements but by action that they do not mean to be unfair to them. The present unrest, perverse thinking and suicidal moves constitute a disease of the social organism. Intense patriotism for the creation of a united and sovereign Bengal having all the attributes of an independent country, is the remedy and not partition.

Mr. C.R. Das is dead. Let his spirit help us in moulding our glorious future. Let the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal agree to his formula of 50:50 enjoyment of political power and economic privileges. I again appeal to the youths of Bengal in the name of her past traditions and glorious future to unite, make a determined effort to dismiss all reactionary thinking and save Bengal from the impending calamity.

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